HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

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HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

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HINTS FOR SUNDAY-SCHOOL TEACHERS AND OTHER BIBLE STUDENTS

BY

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MAR 31 1897

20501 - c. 1

NEW YORK
THOMAS WHITTAKER
2 AND 3 BIBLE HOUSE
1897

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CONTENTS.

PAGE

PREFACE 7

INTRODUCTION 9

PART I. PRINCIPLES 15

PART II. HOW TO STUDY THE VARIOUS PARTS OF THE BIBLE.

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT 55

The Hexateuch 57

The Historical Books 67

The Prophets 73

The Psalms 83

The Wisdom Literature 87

The Remaining Books 93

II. THE NEW TESTAMENT 95

The Gospels 97

The Epistles 118

The Acts of the Apostles 131

The Revelation 132

PREFACE.

THIS little book aims at being a most elementary introduction to the study of the Bible. To many readers much of it will appear to be a perfectly superfluous reiteration of the most obvious truths. But it is a singular fact that warnings that never need to be uttered, and directions that never need to be laid down, in regard to the study of any other work in the world's literature, are imperatively called for to prevent the student of Scripture from being ensnared by the most outrageous devices of misinterpretation. So perverse have been the methods of popular exposition, and so long have they been pursued as of unquestionable validity, that the mention of some of the simplest rules for a right study of the Bible—rules that are accepted without question and applied almost automatically in the case of other books—will no doubt strike some people, who are in a way very familiar with their Bibles, as a daring innovation. Thus it comes about that those principles which should be most evident, and the setting out of which in words may seem to be almost an insult to the reader's intelligence, are in fact the very principles which most urgently require to be insisted on.

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE.

INTRODUCTION.

THE secret of success with any study lies in the discovery and faithful pursuit of a right method. Where this first essential is neglected plodding industry and brilliant genius are equally doomed to failure. Though it may be the case that "there is no royal road to learning," it does not follow that we have no better course than to plunge into a trackless wilderness and wander aimlessly in the vast forest of truth. Some clearly marked path we must take if we are to make any sure progress. And yet it would be better to be hindered by any amount of impediments than to be blindly and obstinately adhering to a totally wrong method, since in that case the more progress we made the farther we should be from the goal.

There is no study with regard to which attention to this question of method is more imperatively called for than that which has the Bible for its subject-matter. In the first place, it must be obvious to all of us that

the supreme importance of the facts and ideas that here come under our notice makes it exceptionally deplorable for the student to go astray. Then, the peculiar difficulties that beset this subject call for especial care in the handling of it. Not only are the truths of religion which we seek in the Bible revelations from a realm of mystery; the very form in which they are presented to us demands close consideration. No doubt the Bible is an open book for the people, not a cipher message of which only the learned possess the key. It is written in the language of popular literature, not that of technical theology. Its most essential truths are within the reach of the most simple reader. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the fact that its origin in antiquity amid Oriental surroundings renders a book that teems with contemporary and local allusions liable to be often misapprehended by modern Western minds, unless care is taken to give due weight to these circumstances.

Unhappily, this is not all. It must be added that the natural difficulties of Bible study have been aggravated immeasurably by the employment of the most eccentric devices in interpretation. Processes which nobody in his senses would dream of using in any other branch of study have been applied to Biblical investigation with a serene confidence that admits of no questioning. The originators of these peculiar ways of confounding Scripture, and the greatest offenders in the use of them, were the Jewish rabbis, scholars who worked on the assumption that, since the law was inspired by God, every word, and, as some taught, even every obscure mark that was slavishly copied from manuscript to

manuscript, must be stored with profound, recondite meanings—as though God could never speak simply to His children! Thus, in the mystical system of interpretation known as the *Cabbala*, the letters of a word were read as initials of other words, which were made to spell out a sentence of hidden meaning; or the numerical value of the letters was summed up and taken to be of sacred significance; or the order of the letters was changed so as to form quite another word. Such absurdities are almost inconceivable to us in the present day, and yet the influence of them lingers in various unnatural ways of reading the Bible, especially whenever there is read into the text anything that was not really contained in it originally. A more philosophic kind of secondary interpretation was developed at Alexandria about the time of Christ—conspicuously by the great scholar Philo, who allegorized the law so as to bring it into harmony with Greek thought, the primary historical meaning, though not denied, being regarded as quite subordinate in importance to the secondary symbolical meaning. For example, in commenting on the migration of Abraham, Philo says that Moses "means by Abraham's country the body, and by his kindred the outward senses, and by his father's house uttered speech"—so that the lesson of the story points to a renunciation of the life of the senses, and so on. This method was copied by the Christian fathers of Alexandria, notably Origen, that prince of allegorists. In the West, Augustine was more moderate in his treatment of Scripture, and yet every reader of *The City of God* will see that he too was to some extent entangled

in the meshes of allegory. A specimen of the old use of allegory may be seen in St. Paul's adaptation of the narrative of Hagar (Gal. iv. 21–30). This method was doubly attractive. On the one hand, it afforded a means of getting over Old Testament difficulties, anything thought to be unworthy of God in particular being thus explained away; on the other hand, by the use of this expedient it was possible to make the text appear to render up the interpreter's favorite ideas.

The opposite extreme is that of the bare literalist. In early times this was seen especially among the millenarians, people who took the predictions of the second advent in a material way by adhering to the exact letter of prophecy; it is not without its representatives among some schools of modern millenarians. But figurative expressions are used in all languages, and they flourish with great luxuriance in the East. It is necessary, therefore, to determine what expressions are to be taken literally and what metaphorically.

In the present day there are two erroneous styles of interpretation, that have grown up in course of time till they have acquired the force of habit:

(1) *The theological method.* The Bible has reached us only after passing down through nearly two thousand years of Christian experience and scholarly thought. It cannot be denied that each of these media has contributed to the deeper and more thorough understanding of Scripture, but neither can it be denied that the stream has been considerably colored by the soil through which it has flowed. Scripture being read by minds saturated with the ideas of later ages, its language is

interpreted according to the later senses in which the words have come to be understood. Thus the word "damnation" calls up before our mind's eye pictures of Dantesque horror, although in the Bible it simply means "condemnation," the particular doom of the condemned being left unnamed unless it is described in the context.

(2) *The textual method.* A sentence, or even a mere fragment of a sentence, picked out of some book of Scripture with a total disregard of its setting and the circumstances under which it was written, is, so to speak, framed as an absolute oracle, holding good for all time and applicable under all circumstances. This is a method that seems to be consecrated by the custom of preachers in discoursing on what are called "texts"; and it has this measure of excuse, that the Bible abounds in aphorisms—in compact, self-contained statements of truth. But the Bible does not consist of nothing but strings of aphorisms. To treat it as though that were the case is as unreasonable as it would be to take a cathedral to pieces and set out in a row the separate stones with which it had been built, supposing that thus we would best interpret the architect's design.

What, then, is the true method for the interpretation of Scripture? In a word, it is the *historical.* The Bible is a book for all time; it contains the revelation of eternal truth; it is most profitably employed when it is applied to the immediate needs and duties of the age, and therefore to turn it into nothing better than a mine for archæological research would be a piece of disastrous pedantry. Nevertheless, this very modern application of the Bible, if it is to be true and just, that

is to say, if it is to be a genuine resorting to the sacred book as a light and a guide, not a degradation of it into a mere tool of our own purposes, must presuppose an honest attempt to discover its genuine meaning; and such an attempt can only be successful when we put ourselves in the circumstances of the authors, so as to read the book as much as possible with the eyes of the men who were inspired to write it. This historical method is no novelty in itself. It was developed by the celebrated Biblical school at Antioch, in opposition to the allegorical method of the Alexandrian theologians; and it found its most brilliant representative in Chrysostom, whose homilies are a perfect storehouse of reasonable interpretation. It would have been well if more recent commentators had kept closer to Chrysostom's wholesome style of handling Scripture. In our own day, however, the historical method is being worked out with all the rigor of scientific accuracy. This, then, will be the method that we will endeavor to understand as we go over the ground that will be indicated in the following pages. For the sake of clearness, it will be well to deal with the subject in two ways: first elucidating general principles, and then applying those principles to the several departments of the Bible.

Part I.

PRINCIPLES.

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PRINCIPLES.

1. *Be careful to work on a correct text.*

If we possessed the Bible in the form of Egyptian hieroglyphics cut in the granite rock of the desert, or in the form of the Babylonian brick libraries which have recently been exhumed, and large instalments of which are now deposited in the British Museum, of course no question of the correctness of the text could arise; when once the experts had deciphered the monuments we should be certain we had what had been originally written by the inspired authors. But the several books of Scripture were first written on skins of animals, and some of them, perhaps, on paper (see 2 John 12), perishable materials which have long since disappeared. Since, then, in no case we can have access to the original autographs, we are wholly dependent on copies, on copies of copies, obtained through a succession of scribes. No doubt most of the copyists were honest men and conscientious in the performance of their laborious tasks; yet errors frequently crept in unawares—it could not have been otherwise; and in some cases the too officious scribes employed their ingenuity on what they regarded as improvements of the

text. If there are disputes as to the exact reading of many passages in the works of Shakespeare, although the great dramatist lived in the age of printing, but three hundred years ago, and wrote in the English language, is it at all surprising that errors should appear in books the most recent of which are six times more ancient than Shakespeare's works, all of them composed in what have long since become dead languages, and all only preserved, for at least fourteen centuries before the invention of printing, and some for a much longer time, by the pen of the copyist? The fact becomes the less remarkable when we consider that in the most primitive ages the sanctity of the text was not sufficiently recognized to secure that scrupulousness in avoiding all inaccuracies, not to mention deliberate alterations, which is requisite for any work of literature to be transmitted intact.

We do not meet with so many variations in the Old Testament as in the New. That, however, is not merely because the Hebrew Scriptures have been preserved with greater care than the Christian, although the rabbis have shown their reverence for the sacred text by cherishing it with pious devotion. It is also due to what happened in the early ages of the Christian era, when what is called the "Massoretic" (i.e., "traditional") text was fixed, for from this time all previous variations disappeared. The work of the Massoretes, as the rabbis who undertook this determination of the text were called, was a loyal attempt to register what they believed to be the traditional reading. Still, it is clear that in some cases they unwittingly registered errors,

and at the same time deprived their posterity of the means of correcting them by permitting the destruction of all various readings. Originally the Hebrew had no vowels; the Massoretes supplied vowel points according to traditional pronunciation, together with numerous suggested emendations, which appear in the margin of the modern Hebrew Bible. This Bible is printed from quite late manuscripts. It may be brought nearer to the Massoretic text by reference to older and better manuscripts. It is difficult to go behind that text, though attempts are now being made to do so by comparison with the Septuagint and other Greek versions.

The case is quite otherwise with the New Testament. Among the 2000 and more known manuscripts, as far as these have been collated, there have been found as many as 182,000 various readings. The bare statement of this fact may strike us as very alarming, seeming to suggest that we could have no certainty as to a genuine New Testament. A careful examination of the facts, however, should dispel any sense of alarm. There is no question whatever about seven eighths of the words of the New Testament, these being contained in all the manuscripts. Questions, therefore, can only be raised concerning the remaining one eighth. Then it is found that the vast majority of the variations are of no serious importance, being perfectly trivial matters of spelling, the position of words, etc. Moreover, by far the larger proportion of the various readings are only found in one manuscript or a few inferior manuscripts, and are at once to be set aside on the unani-

mous testimony of the best manuscripts. Dr. Hort calculated that there remains only one sixtieth of the readings concerning which there can be any real uncertainty.

Since the standard editions of the Greek Testament were edited by Erasmus and his fellow-workers at the "revival of letters," and since our Authorized Version, which was founded on some of these texts, was published, the means for obtaining a correct text have immensely improved. The earlier editors did not possess any of the best old manuscripts, such as those known as the *Vatican* and the *Sinaitic*, both of which date from the fourth century A.D., nor a great many others that are of valuable supplementary use in settling the text. The study of these manuscripts, together with early translations and quotations in the fathers, has led to the development of a complete science known as "textual criticism." It is only reasonable that the judgment of experts in this science should be treated with some respect, just as the judgment of the experts in any other science is treated. While some uncertainty still remains, we may rest assured that the results of research and study have brought us much nearer to what was originally written by the apostolical authors of the New Testament than was possible to the people of the sixteenth century—in fact, that we now have substantially restored the actual text itself. "In the variety and fullness of evidence on which it rests," writes Dr. Hort, "the text of the New Testament stands absolutely alone among ancient prose writings."

Under these circumstances, does it not show grievous

negligence for any serious student of Scripture to continue to read and quote the Bible in the older form, without ascertaining where it has been corrected? For though, as has been stated, the majority of the variations are insignificant, some are very important. For example, where the standard Hebrew Bible and the Authorized Version read, "Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy" (Isa. ix. 3), a text that seems to invite to a sermon against overpopulation, a note of the Massoretes removes the "not" and thus evidently restores the sense which is in harmony with the context; a corrected text removes the final verses of Mark (all after xvi. 8), or, at all events, throws grave doubt on their genuineness, and so prevents us from honestly citing verse 16 in any baptismal controversy; the passage about the woman taken in adultery (John vii. 53–viii. 11), though very likely founded on a true legend, is lacking from most ancient authorities, and must not be reckoned as part of the Bible; the sentence, "There are three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one" (1 John v. 7), is absent from all manuscripts written before the fifteenth century, and therefore must not be appealed to as an argument concerning the Trinity, since it is a manifest forgery; at Luke xiii. 31, instead of "the same day" we should read "the same hour," a correction that makes the situation more intense; in Matthew xix. 17, our Lord's question, which stands in the Authorized Version, "Why callest thou Me good?" when correctly given as in the best manuscripts becomes, "Why askest thou Me concerning the

good?" Similar illustrations abound throughout the Bible, but perhaps these few specimens even may suffice to show how essential it is to be assured that we are working on a genuine, correct text.

The readiest way for the English student to obtain a substantially correct text is to use the *Variorum Bible*, in which the corrections, with their principal authorities, are supplied by foot-notes. The Revised Version is based on most of the more important textual emendations, and in this respect, as well as in the matter of translation, is much more accurate than the Authorized Version. For more advanced study, reference must be made to a critical Greek Testament, such as Westcott and Hort's, or Tischendorf's (eighth edition), which gives the authorities. Weymouth's *Resultant Greek Testament* is valuable for comparing the texts arrived at by the chief critical authorities and for obtaining the general result of all their opinions. Further examination of the correctness of the text may be helped by the use of a good critical commentary.

2. *Endeavor to understand the exact meaning of the words and phrases studied.*

We can make no progress unless we have first of all ascertained the plain grammatical sense of the passage under study. The most thorough process is to go back to the original Hebrew and Greek. Where that is out of the question, it is important to make use of a good translation. For this reason the Revised Version is invaluable to the English Biblical student. It is sometimes said that the older version is more suitable for

devotional purposes; but even this may be questioned if, as cannot be doubted, it is less accurate, for surely, since God is to be worshiped "in truth," it is desirable that all ideas entering into devotion should be as correct as possible. Here, indeed, sentiment comes in, and the touching associations of the old book, that have been familiar to us from our childhood and that link it with memories of those who have gone before, lend a sacredness to every turn of expression, so that we are disconcerted at any change in a well-known and often-used phrase, the variation jarring on the nerves like a discord in music. The noble English of the Authorized Version has made the book, quite apart from its religious value, a classic of the first rank, and any attempt to tamper with its language must be for the worse. This was to be expected when the revision was undertaken. That the revisers have been sometimes unhappy in their phrases, regarded simply from a literary standpoint, cannot be denied. This is especially the case with the New Testament, but the difference is principally owing to the fact that the revision of this portion of Scripture was more thorough than that of the Old Testament. One could wish that the two companies had called in the help of Lord Tennyson or Mr. Ruskin as a referee for the quality of their English. But when the hardest things that the most fastidious criticism can say have been said, the unquestionable fact remains that we have a genuine improvement of incalculable value in the more accurate rendering of the original. Now, seeing that the chief use of the Bible is not its contribution to the pleasures of literature, but a practi-

cal and spiritual service of far greater moment, is it not a little childish to be neglecting a version that is fitted to aid us in coming nearer to the meaning of the divine revelation, simply because that version does not altogether agree with the taste of literary estheticism?

For example, in the Authorized Version we read, "Take no thought for your life" (Matt. vi. 25), a precept that seems to encourage recklessness, although it would not have conveyed that meaning in the sixteenth century, as the word "thought" then had the meaning of "care"; in the Revised Version this is correctly rendered, "Be not anxious for your life." The "bottles" of Matthew ix. 17 in the Authorized Version become "wine-skins" in the Revised Version, and thus the parable in which the word occurs becomes intelligible. In Matthew xvi. 25, 26, according to the Authorized Version, we read of a man saving or losing his "life," and in the very next sentence of his saving or losing his "soul," as though two separate entities were referred to, although the very same word is employed in the Greek for both passages; in the Revised Version the one word "life" is used throughout.

In the account of St. Paul's visit to Athens (Acts xvii. 16–34) some of the best points of St. Luke's very careful and exact narrative are missed in the Authorized Version. They are not all seized in the Revised, but the improvement is conspicuous. According to the Authorized Version, the apostle's spirit was "stirred in him" (verse 16) at the sight of the many idols with which the city perfectly swarmed. The Greek means *irritated, stung;* the Revised Version has "provoked."

Then, both versions have the epithet "babbler" (verse 18). The word in the original is a very peculiar one, meaning primarily a *picker-up of seeds;* and in this sense it was applied to small birds, whence it came to stand for a ne'er-do-well, one who picks up his living anyhow; and finally, in the university town of Athens, as Professor Ramsay has shown, it became a nickname for a pretentious person of no real culture who set up as a scholar. The Authorized Version has "Areopagus" in verse 19 and "Mars' hill" in verse 22 for the same Greek word. The Revised Version has "Areopagus" in both cases, an improvement not only for the sake of uniformity and as a close rendering of the original Greek, but also because the word may not be used here for the hill at all; very possibly it stands for the council, named after the hill from having originally assembled there, which had the duty of determining, on the arrival of any foreign professor, whether he should be permitted to lecture in the university. The phrase "too superstitious" (verse 22) in the Authorized Version does not represent St. Paul's meaning; and the rather milder expression "somewhat superstitious" in the Revised Version is but a slight improvement. The word "religious" in the margin of the Revised Version comes nearer the apostle's intention. He was not so foolish and ungracious as to begin his address by scolding his audience; his speech is a model of courtesy and conciliation throughout, molded with great tact to suit the very unusual audience before which it was delivered. He acknowledged the religiousness of the Athenians exhibited in the multitude of their idols. They

were not really devout; he could not call them "spiritual-minded"; but evidently they paid court to religion —they were "somewhat religious." In the Authorized Version St. Paul is made to say, "As I passed by, and beheld *your devotions*" (verse 23), an expression suggesting the sight of people praying in public after the manner of the Pharisees rebuked by Jesus Christ, or like the Mohammedans of our own day. But the sparkling, witty Athenians were by no means notorious for such solemn acts of devotion. The phrase is corrected by the Revised Version into "the objects of your worship," i.e., the idols already mentioned. It is a mistake of the Authorized Version to represent the altar observed by St. Paul as dedicated "to *the* unknown God" (verse 23), as though the one true Divinity, unrevealed to the heathen world, had been deliberately indicated by the author of the inscription. The Greek is simply "to *an* unknown God," and so it is rendered in the Revised Version. Considering its technical meaning in later theology, "Godhead" is not a happy word in verse 29. "The divine," as suggested in the margin of the Revised Version, is more suitable and better represents St. Paul's idea in this discourse of his among philosophic pagans. Lastly, "winked at" (verse 30, A. V.) is an unworthy expression to be used for God's treatment of man's failings. The Revised Version substitutes "overlooked," a much better rendering.

Accuracy of translation being secured, we have still to be sure that we understand the result. There may be difficulties or obscurities in the original text, in which case too smooth a translation would even be delusive.

Here is the opportunity for the science of exegesis. In approaching a difficult passage, the first requisite is to clear our minds of all prejudices as to what we may happen to wish it to mean. It is important, also, to banish from our thoughts any associations of the words with subsequent theological speculations. Our one aim must be to get at the natural sense of the passage, just as we should do in dealing with any other literature than that of the Bible. It is the business of the commentator to explain the difficulties, but too often the commentator is not without his bias. At all events, it is not desirable to read the Bible through another man's spectacles. We can best feel the freshness and force of it when we look straight at it without any media between the reader and the sacred page. Certainly it is desirable in the first instance to wrestle with the difficulties ourselves. When every effort to find a way through the tangled thicket has failed, it becomes necessary to seek a guide; and even when we think we have solved the problem, it may still be wise to compare notes with the results of the investigations that have been carried on by other people; for we can scarcely venture to assume that our judgment is infallible, or that, like Job's comforters, we are the only wise men. With Scripture study, as well as with practical affairs, it is sometimes found that in a multitude of counselors there is wisdom. The solitary Bible student is apt to develop fads and crotchets, which would be to a large extent eliminated by conference with fellow-students in a class for common Bible study. But even then it is reasonable to suppose he would be

able to obtain invaluable assistance from a reference to the judgment of the great scholars who have proved themselves to be experts in Biblical exegesis. For this reason the modest Bible student cannot afford to dispense with his commentary, though he should be careful not to become a slave to it and should never resort to it in the first instance.

3. *Read every passage in the light of its context.*

The common custom of handling the Bible is not merely to treat it as a string of bead texts; it is to cut the string and scatter the beads. If ever we are to escape from this absurd and misleading abuse of Scripture, it must be by a clear recognition of literary continuity. Serviceable as the division into chapters and verses is for purposes of ready reference, it has lent itself to the encouragement of a fatal process of disintegration. It may be well, therefore, to note that this twofold method of division is not part of the original structure of the books in which it is now found. Our verse division is not much more than three hundred years old. It was the work of Robert Stephens, the editor of the text of the Greek Testament on which our Authorized Version is for the most part founded, who, as his son tells us, hastily jotted down the numbers of the verses in the margin of his Greek Testament as an occupation to beguile the tedium of a journey from Paris to Lyons, on the basis of a similar division of the Hebrew Bible made in the preceding century. The convenience of this arrangement was at once recognized; it was adopted by the editors of the Geneva

Bible and thence it passed into our present Bibles. The chapters are older, dating from Cardinal Hugo, a schoolman of the thirteenth century. For 1500 years the whole Bible existed without verses, for more than 1000 years without chapters. Earlier divisions, however, were known and used as marginal references among the church fathers, but none of them go back to the original composition of the books of Scripture. These were written, as we may see from the earliest extant manuscripts, continuously, without any breaks whatever corresponding to chapter and verse divisions.

Attention to this very elementary fact would entirely abolish many of the most serious misapprehensions of Scripture that still flourish among us like green bay-trees. Thus Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones (Ezek. xxxvii. 1–10) has been taken as a prediction of the resurrection of the body, in total disregard of the express application of it by the prophet himself, in the words that immediately follow, to the national restoration of the Jews after the virtual death of the nation at the Captivity. This has arisen from the habit of reading the account of the vision by itself. If the reader would simply finish the passage he could not fail to see the meaning of it. Or take our Lord's commandment, "Be not anxious for your life," etc. (Matt. vi. 25), which is commonly read by itself as a consolatory recommendation only suggested for our own personal comfort. When we turn to the context we find that Christ is expostulating with His hearers for the *sinful worldliness* of anxiety concerning temporal affairs, since the precept is preceded by the warning, "Ye cannot

serve God and mammon;" and the whole subject of worldly anxiety concludes with an exhortation to those higher pursuits which it hinders fatally, and for the sake of which it must be suppressed, in the words, "But seek ye first His [i.e., your heavenly Father's] kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (verse 33). Again, how common is it to see the text, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. xi. 28), taken as a self-contained aphorism, displayed upon chamber walls as a cheering word for the weary, without the least recognition of the fact that it is a mutilated fragment, a mere torso, beautiful, it is true, and heart-winning, but still not rightly intelligible until it is reunited to its qualifying and explanatory context! When the whole passage in which it occurs is read, we discover that, though coming to Christ is the way to rest, rest is not promised on the sole condition of approach, that submission and discipleship are essential conditions; for our Lord continues, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (verses 29, 30). The whole passage shows that rest is to be got by (1) coming to Christ, (2) taking on His yoke, (3) learning of Him. It is simply a misquotation to give the first of these conditions as though it were the only one laid down, absolutely ignoring the two that follow. Once more, selections from our Lord's prophecy of the overthrow of the Jewish state and the establishment of His kingdom are frequently torn out of their

setting and applied to the destruction of the world at the end of the ages, notwithstanding the positive statement near the conclusion of the predictions, "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished" (Matt. xxiv. 34).

It is clear, then, that we cannot be safe in our interpretation of a sentence or a phrase when we read it by itself. To come to a fair and reasonable understanding of it we must "look before and after," tracing the line of thought that leads up to it, and seeing whether it is the end of a passage or whether it is linked on to subsequent statements which are intended to qualify it or to give it some special application. Read thus, with a careful regard for its setting, many an isolated phrase may be taken up and prized as a jewel of thought. Nevertheless, it is a mistake to be only on the lookout for such phrases when we read the Bible. It is important to keep our eye more on the course of the history or argument which we are reading, for undoubtedly, while the sacred writers drop precious thoughts by the way their main purpose is not to supply us with these valuable hints; they are more concerned with presenting some large picture of divine truth, in which the details take their places and so minister to the perfect idea of the whole, but in which they are not to be studied too minutely to permit of our grasping the main lesson while we are distracted with the minor interests. Scripture is like a gallery of great Turner landscapes with infinite skies, not a collection of minute Dutch interiors.

4. *Note the distinctive character and purpose of each book of Scripture.*

One of the disadvantages of a slavish regard for the division of the books of the Bible into chapters is that we are continually pulling up at what might be called artificial dikes, intercepting the broad fields of revelation, often with little or no regard for the natural lay of the land, and sometimes in violent contravention of its original boundaries, formal canals into which the streams have been diverted from their primitive courses. Occasionally, with an odd perversity, a chapter division will cut right through a narrative or an argument. Thus we have two accounts of the Creation, given in the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis. One would have supposed the sensible arrangement would have been to devote an exact chapter to each. Instead of this we find the first account cut short at the thirty-first verse of chapter i., and resumed in the first three verses of chapter ii., the second account beginning at the fourth verse of this chapter. With a similar fatuity, the conclusion of our Lord's prediction of His return, in Mark viii., is carried over to a new section as the first verse of chapter ix., with the further disadvantage that an entirely false meaning is suggested for it. The words are, "And He said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There be some here of them that stand by, which shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power." Immediately following a prediction of the coming of the Son of man in glory, they evidently refer to that event. But set at the head of the next chapter and thus in close con-

nection with the account of the transfiguration, they are made to point to this occurrence—a wholly wrong turn of thought. Even when, as it must be allowed is more frequently the case, the chapter divisions do not thus violently rend the Scriptures and wrest them to unnatural meanings, too much respect for them will still effectually hinder an adequate appreciation of what we are reading. It is well to leap the dikes boldly and course the land through its length and breadth. In so doing we are not disregarding the ancient landmarks. These petty allotments are comparatively modern innovations, and they invite to a peddling style of study that belittles Scripture. "Cribbed, cabined, and confined" in narrow chapters, we miss the swing and sweep of great arguments and stately narratives. The present-day habit of obtaining literary refreshment in the fragmentary paragraphs of the lighter journals favors a similar use of Scripture, but it is fatal to all serious study.

Out of the multitudes of conscientious Bible readers, probably only a small minority have ever read a single book of Scripture straight through, and very few indeed have ever done so at a sitting in the case of any but the shortest books. The consequence is a complete failure to perceive the distinctive aims and characters of the several books. Accordingly, when a person who may have been quite familiar with his Bible, but only in the old way of reading it in scraps and fragments, breaks loose from the shackles of the chapters and begins *to read the books*, he finds himself in a novel world. The old words are lit up with a new meaning now that they appear as parts of a much larger whole.

In coming, then, to study a book of Scripture, first of all its general character must be inquired into. Is it poetry or prose? imaginative writing or argumentative? history or prophecy or gnomic wisdom? Is it a sober narrative or a passionate drama or a personal letter? Does it contain a code of laws, an assortment of old sayings, a collection of lyrics? How different are these various forms of literature! and yet they are all included within the covers of the Bible, which we commonly regard as one book. It is impossible to ascertain the true meaning of a passage culled from writings of these widely divergent orders until we have considered what is the peculiar character of the book in which it is found. To apply grammar and dictionary, for example, to the daring imagery of the Psalms, just as we would to the narratives in the books of Kings, would be to land ourselves in absurdities of our own careless creation. When we read in a poem of God riding on a cherub (Ps. xviii. 10), it would be out of reason for us to endeavor to get at the meaning of the assertion in the way in which we should examine the statements about the carved cherubim in Solomon's temple.

In the next place, for the right understanding of a book we must ascertain its aim and purpose. In this way we shall discover "the messages of the books." Even a narrative may be written with a certain distinctive purpose. Thus we read in St. John's account of the appearances of the risen Christ, "Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but *these are*

written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in His name" (John xx. 30, 31)—a statement which shows that, since the apostle did not aim at composing an exhaustive narrative, but deliberately limited himself to a selection of incidents which he considered adequate for establishing the foundations of faith, it would be distinctly contrary to what he says to assume that he has given us all the testimony to the resurrection that it was within the range of his experience to furnish. Where books are evidently divided into sections—as in the case of the different "burdens" of a prophet—it is obviously reasonable to consider each section by itself.

5. *Make a separate study of the works of each Scripture writer, and in reading any passage consider it especially with regard to the rest of the writings of its author.*

With any theory of inspiration short of the extravagant notion—derived from the rabbis—that the "inspired penman" is as blind and involuntarily a tool as the pen he handles, some room must be found for the human element in Scripture. While perceiving—as surely we must perceive it—the purifying and uplifting, the enlightening and guiding, influence of the Spirit of God, which conveys the revelation of truth, of the very word of God, unless we wilfully close our eyes or unless we are simply infatuated with prejudices we must also see the distinctive traits of the various writers of the books of the Bible. On the surface of the subject we may detect the same difference of style

that we find among the authors of all other literature, though within a somewhat narrower range of variations. Just as Sophocles differs in style from Homer, Dante from Petrarch, Milton from Spenser, so the author of Job differs from Jeremiah, and the author of the Chronicles from the author of the Kings. In the New Testament each of the four evangelists has his own style. There are certain clear-cut features characteristic of the writings of St. Paul, of St. James, of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews; and there is the perfectly unique "Johannine style." But when we have recognized this we must go further. The style is the man. The form of language being no mere mannerism, but the true expression of the thought that lies behind it, strong differences of style suggest strong differences in ways of thinking. It cannot be denied that the various writers approach their subjects from different standpoints and view them through the media of different mental atmospheres. Isaiah and the author of the Fifty-first Psalm have quite a different way of looking at sacrifices for sin from that of the author of Leviticus. St. Paul, though in essential belief and doctrine quite at one with the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, has a very different manner of handling the relation of the law to the Gospel. It has been shown that there is no real contradiction between St. Paul and St. James in their conceptions of the sphere of faith; yet how different are their ways of treating the subject! — so different as to have given rise very easily to the erroneous notion of a radical contradiction.

The personal element being present, it cannot be

ignored without occasioning grave misapprehensions. We have not so much to "eliminate the personal equation" as to bring all the characteristic ideas of each writer to a focus. It is well, then, to study all that we possess of any particular writer by itself—to read, for example, all the epistles of St. Paul consecutively in the order of time, and to observe what the apostle teaches on the great truths of Christianity, taken one by one in clear distinction. This is a double process. The chronological reading of the epistles helps us to discover the development of the teaching; the topical study enables us to classify the principal items of it. Both must be pursued, and each with a view to the other, if we would comprehend the whole subject. In such a study as this, next to perceiving exactly what St. Paul teaches, it is most important to note what he does not teach. In view of the voluminous dogmatism of later theology—church doctors rushing in where prophets and apostles fear to tread—the silences of Scripture are eloquent with significance. The particular silences of each individual writer are of serious weight in determining the limits of his teaching. On the other hand, it is to be borne in mind, since no writer in the Bible professes to set before us the perfect orb of truth, we must not rush to the conclusion that the segment which any one has occasion to present to us is all he knows, much less that it is all that exists. When, for example, we find St. James in his one brief practical epistle silent on most of the great ideas which fire the enthusiasm of St. Paul, we should be illogical in concluding either that he was ignorant of such truths

as redemption by the cross of Christ and salvation by living union with Christ, or that knowing of them he deliberately rejected them. All we can say for certain is that he did not allude to them in this one writing. At the same time perhaps we should add that if St. Paul were discussing similar practical themes no doubt he would bring in more of the deeper truths to enforce his exhortations. We must be cautious in dealing with the negative evidence of silence; still, we must not fail to note the silence where it exists, and, above all, we must avoid the careless blunder of attributing to a writer in the Bible anything that we have not found in his own works, simply on the vague ground that we believe it to be "Scripture teaching." The blurring of features that results from a neglect of the characteristic differences of the writers is like one of those confused pictures that are produced by taking photographs of several people successively upon the same negative. Immediately we study each author by himself we begin to perceive a crispness of outline and a vividness of coloring that add immensely to the interest of our reading.

Having made this separate study of the separate writers, we must not forget the results of it when we are reading any particular portion of the Scriptures. We are told that "Scripture is the best commentary on Scripture" and that we should "interpret Scripture by Scripture"—proverbial advice which is based on a broad foundation of good sense. There is a true unity in the Bible. The languages—the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New—are best illustrated

from those books respectively. There is a certain common character in all ancient Hebrew literature, and a certain common character in all primitive Christian literature, and a certain Biblical character belonging to the two. The development of one religious revelation throughout, under the guidance of the one divine Spirit, involves an essential unity. Nevertheless, when we come to details we must learn to interpret Isaiah by Isaiah, Paul by Paul, John by John, if we would obtain exact and definite results. In considering the meaning of a peculiar word or phrase, it is not enough to learn what is the "general usage of Scripture." There may be no one "general usage of Scripture." Grievous mistakes may be made by a mechanical application of "reference Bibles." When a certain word is hunted up in several widely separated books of Scripture, and the scattered passages in which it is found brought together to throw light on its meaning in the particular passage under study, the rough-and-ready process may be most delusive, because the word may be used with quite different relations by different writers. The trouble about St. James's epistle has risen chiefly out of a mistake of this sort. People bringing to the reading of it notions about "justification" and "faith" derived from other parts of the Bible, principally from St. Paul's writings, first read those alien notions into the epistle and then judge the author for what he never meant. To understand the very special sense in which the two words are used by St. James we must study them in his own work. When we do so we shall find that he is writing about an entirely different justification from

that of the Epistle to the Romans,—St. Paul dealing with God's forgiveness of the sinner at the beginning of the Christian life, St. James with His approbation of the saint at the end,—and that he is writing about an entirely different faith—indeed, mentioning two kinds of faith: the "living" faith, of which he approves, and which corresponds to the *only* faith referred to by St. Paul, and the "dead" faith, which is another name for a barren intellectual assent. It is absolutely necessary to study the writer by himself in order to discover these distinctive ideas.

6. *Study each part of the Bible in connection with the period when it was written, and take into account the circumstances of its origin.*

We are reminded in the Epistle to the Hebrews that God spoke to the fathers in the prophets "by divers portions" and "in divers manners" (Heb. i. 1). This twofold diversity, numerical and qualitative, the plurality of the writings and their differences of form and character, is the necessary consequence of the fact that divine revelation was not confined to one brief moment of time. The inspired utterances are spread over a period of about a thousand years, and by no means equally. The divine light is concentrated now and again into foci, brilliant epochs of revelation, separated by times when "the word of the Lord was rare." Each of these epochs has its own special characteristics, and the writings belonging to it naturally form a group by themselves. Therefore for purposes of fruitful study it becomes necessary to sort out these groups

and take the members of each group together so that they may throw light on one another. This is invariably acknowledged to be the correct way of studying any national literature. What we have to see is that the Bible, or rather the Old Testament, is the national literature of Israel. It differs from other literature in its wonderful inspiration, but it is none the less subject to the general laws that obtain in all other national literature. In this respect it is utterly different from the Koran, which is the creation of one mind at one point of time. The many minds in many ages that have wrought at the formation of the Bible have left on it the stamp of each of their own peculiar periods. In English literature we distinguish certain glorious ages when the tide ran strong and free—the period of Chaucer, the Elizabethan age, the times of Queen Anne, the Victorian era. Similarly, in the course of the literature of Israel, we have marked ages of especial productiveness, such as the eighth century B.C., the time of the Exile, the age of the Return, the apostolic era. It is desirable, therefore, to map out the whole field of Scripture in order to see clearly where the great demarcations are to be found, and then to arrange the several books accordingly.

This should be the main course of study, a study of epochs in their entirety. Then, if we have occasion to fix our attention on an isolated passage of Scripture, we must attempt to assign its place in the epoch to which it belongs. When we have succeeded in doing this we have struck off at one blow a good half of the common misapprehensions of Scripture. These misapprehen-

sions are for the most part egregious anachronisms. The cure for them is chronology. When this is observed it will appear as absurd to look for the Christian sacraments in the law of Moses as to assign cannon to the battle of Actium, and conversely as unreasonable to define Christian doctrines in terms of the Levitical sacrifices as to furnish out our modern soldiers with the chain-armor and battle-axes of the crusaders. We shall cease to read the ideas of the later period into the writings of the earlier, and we shall no longer cramp the meaning of the fuller revelation by endeavoring to bring it within the forms of the earlier—what is that but to put new wine in old bottles? Let us treasure the old wine in the old bottles for its own sake; we shall learn to appreciate its fine flavor all the better, so long as we abstain from the barbarity of an unnatural mixture.

7. *Trace the historical development of revelation.*

This process of study—one of the most important and fruitful in the whole range of Scripture subjects—is closely associated with the previous one. If the contents of the Bible fall into a number of successive periods, it is clear that an orderly and progressive consideration of those periods must yield better results than one that is irregular and casual. It is a great step to have come to recognize the several eras of revelation and to have allotted each portion of Scripture to its own age. The miserable confusion that comes of the neglect of chronology is thus avoided, and the grouping of all the works of a period together,

aided by a collection of any available information about that particular period, is certain to issue in a wonderful illumination of the Scripture studied. But having attained that object, we are prepared to take another step of equal importance, and, arranging the periods in the natural order of time, to consider their relation one to another, and the character and issue of the whole course of revelation through these successive periods. This is the only way in which we can ever hope to sum up the total teaching of the Bible, or, since the wealth and spiritual depth of Scripture are inexhaustible, at least to map out the main outlines of its ideas.

Working under the guidance of a good chronological arrangement of the books of the Bible, for our present purpose we begin with what have come to be regarded as the earliest books, and so work on through the Old Testament. Then it is desirable to see how the old revelation was leading up to the new—how much, for example, Jeremiah prepared the way for Christ.

In the New Testament we begin with the life and teachings of Christ, for, though the Gospels were not written till after most of the epistles, the contents of the Gospels are concerned with the events and teachings of the very dawn of Christianity. Passing on to the epistles, we shall find it wise to read them in chronological order. St. Paul's epistles should certainly be read in this way, that we may follow the course of the apostle's mind and teaching.

Similarly we may trace out the course of some one particular line of teaching. Thus it is a very valuable

study, though one of peculiar difficulty, to endeavor to see how the doctrine of God was treated in successive ages by prophets and apostles: to trace the perception of the unity of God in advance of the simple notion of the tribal divinity; then to see how the idea of the holiness of God, from meaning little more than an awful separateness from man, deepened its moral content; to see the growing perception of the spirituality of God; and, lastly, to reach the wonderful thought of the love of God as this is revealed in Christ and explained by St. John. Another very fruitful study is that of the doctrine of the Messiah in the Old Testament, and the more spiritual treatment of the idea by Jesus Christ. In connection with this there is the idea of the suffering "servant of the Lord" in Isaiah, and a few kindred thoughts in the Old Testament, which may be traced on to the full doctrine of the cross in the New Testament. Then the germs of the doctrine of a future life may be detected in the Old Testament, and the whole course of the earlier ideas concerning the state of the dead examined and traced out in their development through successive ages, till we reach the full Christian revelation of eternal life in Jesus Christ. The subject of Biblical ethics may well constitute a branch of study by itself; and if so, it will call to be treated in a similar chronological order. The negative character of most of the Decalogue, the savage vengeance of the denunciatory psalms, the worldly wisdom of some of the maxims in Proverbs, will all take their right places, neither to be quoted as representing an absolute standard of conduct for all time, nor to be denounced as

inferior and in some cases immoral, but to be studied in the order of their development, a development which only reaches its perfection in the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount.

NOTE.—This study is somewhat complicated by the question of the reëditing of books, or of their original composite character. Thus the same book may contain passages of various ages. It is scarcely possible for any but the most advanced Biblical students to follow out these fine critical distinctions. For a beginning we must be content to take the fairly established results as given by the soundest critics.

8. *Study the Bible in sympathy with the spirit in which it was written.*

There is a profound truth in the familiar statement that a simple, pious soul will reach the heart of Scripture, while the keenest critic who is out of touch with its spiritual ideas must fail to understand the deepest truths of the book. But this should not discourage a thorough critical study, for his piety will not prevent his simplicity from landing an unenlightened person in ridiculous errors, as the absurd notions about the Bible entertained by some very good people show us very clearly. It should rather point to the combination of the spiritual with the intellectual qualifications. For the practical use of the Bible as a guide to life, undoubtedly the spiritual is the qualification of first importance. It is scarcely less essential for a right understanding of the book in the severe process of critical study. The student who is not conscious within himself of the spirit that breathes through the divine ideas

of Scripture can never grasp those ideas in their fullness of meaning.

This principle is not peculiar to the study of the Bible; it applies to the study of all literature, and in its widest bearing to the study of all truths and facts. A literary sympathy is essential to literary appreciation. Certain kinds of literature appeal to certain orders of mind only. It is simply impossible for a man who has no poetry in his soul to understand the poetry that is in books; and among the lovers of verse there are differences of temperament and culture that determine limitations in appreciation. The growing love and veneration for Wordsworth are still necessarily limited to the disciples who have drunk of the spirit of the prophet of nature. Browning's bracing verse will never appeal to any but minds which may be compared to those constitutions that thrive on the east wind. Pope's *Essay on Man* could only be appreciated by people who would breathe best in the clear, thin air of the eighteenth century. Similarly it is the scientific temper that best perceives the merits of Darwin. In philosophy there are born Platonists; and Hegel appeals to a different order of mind from that in which John Stuart Mill found his disciples.

We must not suppose, however, that a peculiar literary temper is needed for the enjoyment of the Bible. That were to treat it as no longer the book of the people, nay, to relegate it to the library of the pedant, considering *what* a book it is! The Bible was written for the people, and it has not missed its aim. Its broad, simple treatment of great themes of universal human

interest is just the prime necessity for a book of world-wide and continuous popular interest.

Where, then, does this comparison with other subjects of study come in? It consists in the spiritual, the religious character of the book, not in its literary form or tone. This is the most wonderful fact about it. To miss this is to miss everything. Therefore it is but applying the general condition for the successful pursuit of all study to the special qualities of this study to say that, as a kindred spirit of poetry in the soul is requisite for the understanding of Wordsworth, and a mind in harmony with Plato is necessary for an appreciation of the great *Dialogues*, so, not a poetic, not a philosophic, but a religious, spirit is essential to a right comprehension of the Bible.

We may put it thus: the secret of the Bible's greatness is the inspiration of its authors. Then the key to the choicest treasures of the book must be the inspiration of its readers. This idea was very clear to the Reformers, and it was very definitely expressed by Calvin in his *Institutes*. When we remember what is the chief characteristic of Scripture, we shall see how eminently reasonable it is, how entirely in accord with the necessary conditions of all kinds of study, that this study should only be undertaken in the mental attitude of prayer, with a devout effort to bring our minds into harmony with the divine thought, with a distinct seeking of the aid of the Spirit of God in our hearts for the perception of His word in the sacred book.

What we have to see in the present day, in view of the peculiar problems that face us and with regard to

the newer way of reading the Bible, is that the two lines of approach to the book—the intellectual and the spiritual—in no way interfere with one another; that, on the contrary, they assist one another, and therefore must both be followed with whole-hearted thoroughness. The conclusion may be stated in two ways for its two aspects:

(1) The critical study of the Bible in no degree supersedes the devout study, but even requires spirituality in order to reach its own ends.

(2) The devout study of the Bible by no means precludes the critical, but, after helping to make this the more keen and penetrating, profits by the rich results of research.

9. *Use common intelligence in the reading of Scripture.* It seems almost an insult to the reader to offer him such a precept as this; but unfortunately there is no precept that is more needing to be insisted on. It is not, of course, that Bible students are unintelligent persons, but that so many people seem to lock up their intelligence whenever they approach this one subject of study. The mind, indeed, is at work, in some respects a little too freely, but not the intelligence; and the results of this comparatively unintelligent mental activity are not a little curious. They are seen in the quaintest inventions, linked to the most unbounded assumptions —ideas as fantastic as the fairy fancies of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, wedded to a stern dogmatism worthy of the papacy. This riot of undisciplined thinking is met with especially in two regions—its two favorite hunt-

ing-grounds. One is the region of typology. The Old Testament is ransacked to furnish analogies for Christian doctrine in the smallest details of its narratives, and especially in the minutest regulations of the tabernacle worship—a procedure inherited from the early fathers, some of whom were great offenders in this particular, they in their turn treading in the wake of the Jewish allegorists of schools both in Alexandria and at Jerusalem. The other is the region of eschatology, or the doctrine of the last times, with a special reference to the second coming of Jesus Christ. It cannot be denied that much devout thinking has been applied to each of these subjects; and yet as a rule it has been at sea, for the want of that simple intelligence in which some of the people who most frequently handle them are not found wanting when engaged in any other pursuit. What is needed is more lucidity of perception, more breadth of grasp, more calmness of judgment—in a word, more *sanity*.

There is an appeal to common sense which indicates a terrible narrowness of mind—the appeal which will admit nothing outside the range of a very limited, mundane experience. In the Bible we are approached by a world of wonders far above our every-day life. It is not to be supposed that a sound commercial judgment, which may be quite adequate for settling bargains in the market, is competent to give a final decision on questions that touch the eternal verities. But then, a wild, undisciplined fancy is no more competent to settle them. While all the cautions already referred to need to be borne in mind, and while it is well to tread softly,

knowing our own littleness and dimness of vision before the light of divine truth, it is at least wise, if we use our minds at all, to use them sensibly. The subjects brought before us are many of them far above the plane of our every-day life. But that is no reason why we should, so to speak, go up in a balloon to chase them. It is rather a call for the preservation of the greatest reasonableness in the thinking that we venture to employ upon them—not in order to rationalize them, but to preserve our own reason in our comprehension of them. When we are tempted to adopt an interpretation of any passage which seems to strike our imagination as fresh and interesting, or which appears to chime in with some of our cherished notions, we should do well to ask ourselves, in the most absolute sobriety of judgment, with a stern regard for truth and honesty, "Is this really what the passage means?" and abide by the answer even when it is not to our mind, like him who "sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not."

This does not mean that we are to be tied down in every case to the barest literalism, which would often be false to the intention of the sacred writers. It is important to discover what language is historical and what symbolical, and to read every passage according to its actual character in these respects. The mistake is when the historical is converted into the symbolical, or the symbolical assumed to be historical. Here it is that the largest sanity of judgment is called for.

There is still, however, room for the perception of analogies and what are technically called "types." The Epistle to the Hebrews is our great authority for this

subject; there we see how the facts of the Old Covenant are shadows of those which belong to the New Covenant. We have no justification for reading the full scheme of Christian doctrine into the earlier revelation; to do so would be to neglect the lessons that are taught us by the history of revelation. The shadow does not contain the substance; it gives us but a faint and vague suggestion of the object it represents. Moreover, we must not press the illustration too far. In reality the object must be present at the same time as the shadow it produces. But the Old Testament type precedes the Christian fact. To talk of "a shadow thrown back" is a confusing style of speech; no shadow can be thrown back in order of time. What we really have in the type is the imperfect—and therefore in a sense the shadowy—presence of what we have more fully and perfectly in the accomplishment by Jesus Christ. It is interesting to trace these faint beginnings. In their very imperfection they are evidences of the striving after a fuller realization, and therefore to faith mute prophecies of that realization.

Lastly, a sober intelligence may apply the ancient lessons of revelation to the circumstances and needs of to-day. After all, this is the supreme use of that revelation to us. We do not study the Bible merely with the interest of the curious in the antiquities of the Jews. It is to be the lamp to *our* feet, the light to *our* path. In order that it may be this we must first of all ascertain the meaning which is brought out by a process of genuine historical interpretation. Then we are free to discover the lessons of the ancient history for modern

times, and the eternal truths expressed in the ancient words, that speak to our age, as they speak to all ages, of Him "in whom is no variableness, neither shadow cast by turning." In this way all the Bible leads up to Christ, and in Him becomes the revelation of God for all time, because He is "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever."

For Biblical study one of the various Bible helps may be found very serviceable, such as the following: Bagster's, the Cambridge, or the Oxford "Helps"; "The Bible Reader's Manual," international teachers' edition; "The Variorum Aids to the Bible Student." Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible" is valuable for reference.

For the discussion of questions concerning the inspiration and other characteristics of the Bible, see Briggs, "Biblical Study," and "The Bible, the Church, and the Reason"; Horton, "Inspiration and the Bible" and "Revelation and the Bible"; Myers, "Catholic Thoughts on the Bible."

Part II.

HOW TO STUDY THE VARIOUS PARTS OF THE BIBLE.

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I. THE OLD TESTAMENT.

Thus far we have been considering the general principles that should guide us in all Biblical study. Now let us proceed to the special application of those principles to the different parts of the Bible, beginning with the Old Testament. It is evident to the most casual reader that we have here a library of books differing among themselves very considerably—narratives, codes of law, prophetic discourses, poems, proverbs, etc. The Jews divided their Bible into three volumes, which they called respectively the *Law*, the *Prophets*, and the *Writings*. This division roughly corresponds to a radical distinction between three classes of literature that we meet with in the Old Testament. The distinctions, it is found, go far deeper than the form of the books and the style in which they are written, being traceable down to the underlying ideas. When we study each of these great divisions by itself, searching out its specific teaching and rigorously confining our attention to that alone, it becomes perfectly apparent to us that there were va-

rious schools among the Jews of Old Testament days, as there were in the days of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes—differences which may be compared to those in New Testament times between the followers of St. James and the followers of St. Paul, or those in later ages between Lutherans and Zwinglians, between Calvinists and Methodists. Possibly this statement may strike the reader who is not prepared for it with a sense of dismay. We appeal to the Bible from the wrangling of the sects, and now we are told that corresponding differences are to be met with even there! If our court of appeal is divided within itself, how shall we obtain a final judgment on our case? Now, it may be as well to remember that hitherto the reference to Scripture has not put an end to controversy, which has gone on through all these dreary centuries in spite of it. Both Whitefield and Wesley relied on their Bibles, and yet they quarreled. No doubt wiser methods of Biblical study than were pursued by controversialists in the past would have resulted in a nearer approach to unanimity of opinion as to its teachings. But there is another way of looking at the case. These differences are not so fatal as the sects, in the narrowness of their creeds and the bitterness of their conflicts, have supposed. Whatever may be our opinion as to the rights of the quarrel between Calvinists and Methodists, who will venture to say that in their great evangelistic work either Whitefield or Wesley was false to the Gospel of Christ?

We must not make too much of the differences between the Jewish writers. At heart they were agreed

in the faith of Jehovah. What they show by their differences is partly that the vital, spiritual truths of the Old Testament revelation are infinitely more important than the forms in which they were conceived by the various schools of Jews, and partly that these truths themselves may be approached from different points of view, the aspects of which are not altogether the same, although what is really meant in the essence of it is much nearer identity than we might suppose from the very different ways in which it is expressed.

Neither should we let these differences disturb our faith in the inspiration of the several books. It is fatal to an artificial theory of inspiration. With such facts as these before us it will be impossible to continue asserting that the "sacred penman" was a mere amanuensis, to whom every word he wrote had been dictated. But it does not conflict with the saner theory that the Spirit of God opened the minds of the writers to perceive truth, and breathed through their thoughts in the expression of it.

See Wright, "Introduction to the Old Testament," and Bennett, "The Theology of the Old Testament" ("Theological Educator"); Driver, "Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament"; Ryle, "Canon of the Old Testament"; Buhl, "Canon of the Text of the Old Testament"; Davidson, "Canon of the Bible."

I. THE HEXATEUCH.

Of all the problems that concern the authorship and history of the books of the Old Testament, the most complicated and perplexing is that of the Hexateuch.

This name is now given to the first six books of the Old Testament—the Pentateuch and the kindred Book of Joshua. We have not merely to answer "Yes" or "No" to the one question, "Did Moses write the Pentateuch?" A host of inquiries crowd upon us as soon as we begin to analyze the first volume of the Hebrew Bible. So elaborate are the problems that bristle round the subject that we are tempted to lose heart in our search for a path through a forest of briers like that which guarded the sleeping beauty in her enchanted palace. But this would be a mistake. Fine historical and literary inquiries must be left to the experts, who alone have the necessary equipment for the successful pursuit of them. But certain broad results have been fairly ascertained, and with these it is our duty to make ourselves acquainted if we would understand what we are reading. Nor have we to be altogether content with the unsatisfactory position of simply taking on authority what has been settled by the specialists. Much of the subject appeals to the judgment of the general reader, and can be judged on its own merits when once its salient features have been pointed out.

1. *The Origins.*—Whatever may be said of the date of the Hexateuch as a whole, it is perfectly clear that the Book of Genesis must have been written long after the events to which it refers could have occurred. Even on the old theory that the world was created but 6000 years ago, and granting that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, he would have been giving his accounts of the Creation and the story of Adam and Eve between

two and three thousand years after the things he narrated took place. We have no record whatever of the way in which any chronicles of the antiquities of the human race were preserved in primitive times. At best, then, we should have to conclude that Moses was like a modern historian who undertook to give an account of the Britons who lived on our island long before the days of Julius Cæsar, without, as far as we could ascertain, possessing Cæsar's famous *Commentaries* or any authority from an intermediate period that we could identify or authenticate. In point of fact, we know that the creation of the world took place in an antiquity immeasurably distant from us, and we know that the origin of man must be put back many thousands of years, so that the time between the writing of Genesis, whenever it may have been composed, —the question of its date is limited to a few hundred years,—and the creation of the world, or even the origin of man, is vast beyond calculation. Is it not apparent, then, that writings such as the early chapters of Genesis cannot be put on a level with contemporary or nearly contemporary records, like the books of Kings, as equally solid grounds of historical knowledge? It is nothing to reply that God could have revealed these occurrences of an immeasurable antiquity to Moses or any other inspired writer. Nobody who believes in God can deny the possibility. But then, what evidence have we that He did so? Genesis itself does not claim such an origin, nor does any writer of the Bible attribute it to Genesis. It is a pure assumption to assert that anything of the kind occurred.

The late Mr. George Smith and other Assyriologists have shown remarkable parallels between the stories in Genesis of the Creation, the garden of Eden, the Flood, etc., and mythological writings preserved in the brick libraries of Babylon. Such discoveries go to show that our familiar Bible stories represent the early idea of the Semitic race on the great question of the origin of all things. There is, however, an important difference between the Babylonian and the Hebrew narratives. In the former we meet with the various divinities of a polytheistic system, and the old legends are worked up with monstrous absurdities. In Genesis all is grave, severe, and sober, and the one and holy God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. Here we have the religious interest of the narratives. This is the mark of their true inspiration, the inspiration that lifts them out of the follies and debasing influences of heathenism, and breathes into them great ideas concerning God's relation to creation, and man's sin, and God's treatment of him in his fallen state. These are truths of profound importance, and they are taught in the opening chapters of Genesis with a clearness, a force, a sublimity, unapproached in any other literature of the world. We have no excuse for turning to the early chapters of Genesis for instruction in astronomy, geology, or the antiquities of prehistoric man, but they are of permanent interest and authority for truths which no science can discover.

2. *The Patriarchs.*—The case of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and his brothers, is very

different. It is true they all lived some centuries before the earliest date that can be assigned to the Book of Genesis, and therefore we are compelled to read the narratives concerning them with a certain reservation of entire assent. This is a case where it is unwise to dogmatize one way or the other. We have to deal with a question of probability. It is very important to recognize that there are many statements concerning which we cannot come to absolute conclusions. The mists that hang on the horizon of history often compel us to suspend our judgment and, while not denying that things may have occurred just as they are recorded, to admit the possibility that the later writings may not entirely correspond to the actual occurrences, from which they are divided by several centuries. Still, we have here a very different case from that of the dim antiquities of the world. We stand within the period of known history in neighboring countries. The hieroglyphics of Egypt on the one hand, and the brick tablets of Babylon on the other, run side by side with the history of the Hebrew patriarchs. What light has come from the ancient monuments tends in the direction of confirming the truth of the patriarchal history. There is some probability that Abraham's birthplace, Ur of the Chaldees, has been identified at Mugheir on the Euphrates. The war with Chedorlaomer, described in Genesis xiv., is very clearly referred to in the monuments, though the date of it is too early for the Biblical date. It may be said that, since but a few small points have been identified, these cannot be used to authenticate every detail of the Biblical narrative. But it is a

matter of some importance that on the whole the discoveries tend, as far as they go, toward the verification of that narrative. They dispel the rash assertion, which some have ventured to make, that the stories of the patriarchs, in common with the legends of early Rome and Greece, were nothing but astronomical myths, and they give us some encouragement in believing that the Hebrews had preserved genuine traditions of their ancestors. Some of us would go farther and express our strong conviction that such firm character-drawing as we have in these narratives, together with the revelation of a profound movement of Providence that runs through them all, speaks for their substantial historicity.

3. *Parallel Narratives.*—One of the most remarkable facts to be noted in reading the Hexateuch is the constant recurrence of parallel narratives. The same events are recorded twice, but with variations. This fact meets us on the very opening pages of Genesis. We have two accounts of the Creation, two accounts of the Flood, and so on. When these parallel narratives are compared it is found that they have certain characteristic differences, which are preserved throughout, showing that we have here to do with two streams, which were originally separated, but which have been brought together by some later editor. The most obvious difference between them is in the use of words for God. In the one narrative we meet with the name "God" simply; in the other we read "the *Lord* God," i.e., in the Hebrew, *Javeh*, Jehovah. Thus the first ac-

count of the Creation has "God" throughout; the second has "the Lord God." Then certain marked differences of style may be traced out. Thus the sections with the name "God" only are written in a dry, severe style, with favorite formulæ, that frequently recur after the manner of a law code; but the sections with the name "the Lord" (Jehovah) have a richer vocabulary and are composed with more glow and color, allowing of poetic touches and indications of sympathy with nature. Further, it may be noticed that the former sections correspond strictly to the character of the law, while the latter, although they form an integral part of the Hexateuch, are in sympathy with the spirit of the second volume, that of the *Prophets*. This shows that when we begin to analyze the books of the Old Testament we cannot keep entirely to the division made by the Jews in the arrangement of their canon for forming our estimate of the distinctive characters of the several parts of the sacred collection.

The existence of these parallel narratives will account for what might otherwise appear to be most inexplicable discrepancies between different parts of the ancient history. The editor had two narratives before him, and in some cases he set them down side by side, while in others he took some steps toward combining them. In the former case he made no attempt at reconciling them. They were two versions of the same incident, and he thought it would interest his readers to see them side by side. The differences which we see must have been patent to him—some of them, at all events; yet he let them stand. It is clear, then, that they did not trouble

him; and if they did not trouble him it is also clear that he did not take the narrow, pedantic view of the literalists of later times, did not suppose that exact verbal accuracy was to be looked for in his sources, but thought it well to let his readers see for themselves the different versions of the ancient narratives that had come down to his time. They are valuable to us in this way; and when we go further and discover the different tendencies of the various parts of the Hexateuch they are valuable in throwing light on the successive stages of the history of revelation. All this has to be recognized whatever date we assign to the final shaping of the work.

4. *Deuteronomy.*—The Book of Deuteronomy stands in a measure by itself as a section of the Hexateuch. It is a distinct version of the law, going over much of the ground that is covered in Exodus and the intermediate books. It has a remarkable unity of treatment from beginning to end, and is characterized by certain clearly marked traits of its own. We cannot but be struck with its peculiar style, a voluminousness of language, a delight in large ethical principles, a hortatory tone—characteristics that indicate the earnest preacher rather than the cool lawgiver. These features of what we may call the Deuteronomic style reappear in Jeremiah and other writers, who were deeply influenced by this wonderful book. In these respects it differs considerably from the dry legality of Leviticus. Like the Jehovistic narratives, it has more of the prophetic temper. Then, in treating of matters of ceremonial it

does not go altogether on the same lines as Leviticus. For example, throughout the Book of Deuteronomy the Levites are identified with the priests; in Leviticus they form a lower order of the ministry, only acting as attendants of the priests, and not allowed themselves to perform the holy functions.

The Book of Deuteronomy should be read in connection with the period when it became known and when it influenced the Jews. A number of circumstances point to the conviction that this period was the time of Josiah's reformation. It seems to be now fairly proved that "the book of the law" which Hilkiah the priest found in the temple was no other than our Deuteronomy (2 Kings xxii. 8). The discovery of this book produced a profound effect, which issued in the reforms carried out by Josiah; for those reforms, as recorded in the history, are just in accordance with the precepts laid down in Deuteronomy. When it was read it came upon the king and his people with a shock of surprise. They found, to their dismay, that they had been unwittingly disobeying its precepts. This entirely agrees with what we know of the earlier history of the kingdom. There is no indication that some of the most prominent principles of Deuteronomy had been followed hitherto, or that there had been any feeling that some of the things it most severely condemns were wrong. Thus it dwells on the importance of worship at the one central shrine, and forbids that worship at the high places which was freely practised in the days of Elijah, and even encouraged and revived by the prophet in the famous scene at Carmel.

5. *Leviticus and the Law.*—Although Deuteronomy now comes last among the books of the Pentateuch, it seems to be fairly proved that the law, as we now have it in Leviticus and other parts of the Pentateuch that correspond to the character of Leviticus, is of later date. We have no indication that the elaborate system of priests and sacrifices that is found in the perfect law was adopted by the Jews before the Exile. We must not assume, however, that it was entirely a creation of that period. It was then recognized as "the law of Moses," and it is most reasonable to suppose that it was a development of very ancient practices. Some of the laws are evidently bequeathed from primitive times; but as we now have them they are worked up in the system which was made known to the people by Ezra. From the time of Ezra we have the complete Pentateuch. A little later Joshua is added, thus making up what we now name the Hexateuch. The work comes to us with its various strata preserved, but yet rounded off and shaped into one work, the late date of the final editing of which should be recognized when we study its constituent parts.

If, then, we set ourselves to the study of the Hexateuch, in view of the complicated construction of this part of the Bible and the obscure problems of its origin and development, it would seem that our path is beset with difficulties. Instead of our beginning here, according to old custom, as with the most elementary subject, the facts of the case would rather lead us to reserve this subject for the riper powers of advanced scholarship. The moral problems, too, which overshadow this portion of Scripture demand some under-

standing of its history and construction before we can do justice to them. When the right perspective is obtained we can see that it is in the highest degree uncritical to judge them by any absolute standard of ethics. They must be regarded historically. In coming to a serious examination of the Hexateuch, we must approach it along the lines of its composite construction and historical development. Meanwhile, until we are able to do this, it is most important to remember that we are not in a position to pronounce any judgment either on historical or on moral difficulties. If, therefore, we can go no further, it will be much to have learned the wisdom of holding our judgment in suspense. This is not only a lesson in humility; it is really a relief to the sense of painful perplexity with which the strange things narrated, especially in Genesis and Joshua, so often oppress the reader. It might seem that the natural conclusion was that a very important part of the Bible was beyond the grasp of the ordinary reader and must be left to the interpretation of the professional scholar. But it should be recognized that a great many of the lessons of these first books of the Old Testament are easily understood and lie outside the region of historical and literary discussions.

See W. R. Smith, "The Old Testament in the Jewish Church"; Wellhausen, "History of Israel"; Kuenen, "The Hexateuch"; Cave, "Inspiration of the Old Testament."

II. THE HISTORICAL BOOKS.

When we come to the history of Israel after the settlement in Canaan we are approaching times the

history of which is chronicled by nearly contemporary writers. It is true the books as we now possess them represent a later date than the events they record, but they evidently rely upon earlier information. We have to recollect that we are dealing with narratives that have been subjected to editing and revision. Still, in some cases we have direct appeals to the original authorities, and as we approach the later history of the kingdoms we find ourselves emerging into full daylight.

1. *Judges.*—This book contains the most obscure section of the history of Israel after that of the Hexateuch, as it is also the most ancient. It is not easy to say how long a time it covers. The book abounds in chronological statements, and if we add its periods together we get a total of 410 years. But this is too long to be brought into agreement with the 480 years stated in 1 Kings vi. 1 to be the time from the Exodus to the fourth year of Solomon. Possibly some of the judges were contemporary, ruling over different tribes at the same time. The narratives would seem to be derived in part from tribal traditions and old ballads. For example, the *Song of Deborah* (chap. v.) is one of these ballads; from it we get a very ancient account of the defeat of Sisera, parallel to, but slightly divergent from, the prose account, which we may probably attribute to tribal tradition (chap. iv.). The compilation and editing of the whole book is attributed to the later days of the kings; and not only the substance, but much of the original form, is preserved even in the

prose parts of the work. The reader cannot but be struck with the old-world flavor of these strange stories.

This very antiquity of the elements of the Book of Judges suggests the point of view from which its moral problems should be regarded. Some of the darkest deeds of some of the darkest days in the history of Israel are here recorded. Nobody would dream of condoning all these awful crimes simply on the ground that they are reported in the Bible, nor because in most cases they were committed by Israelites. Many of them are condemned in the book itself. Subsequently the prophets were unsparing in lashing the vices of the "chosen people," never dreaming of sparing them on account of their privileged condition. A crime is a crime, whether committed by a Jew or a Gentile. The case is more complicated where what we cannot but hold to be morally reprehensible appears to be treated with approval. There is a gloating over the blood of the enemies of Israel in this book, as in some other parts of the Old Testament, which cannot be regarded as exemplary. Deborah exults in Jael's treachery. Most assuredly the passions indulged in by the Israelites in the excitement of a life-and-death struggle are not to be transferred to the experience of Christians. In justice both to Jael and to Deborah, who celebrates her feat so gleefully, it must be remembered that neither had the light of Christian truth, that both, indeed, belonged to a very rough, primitive time, a time of semi-barbarism, and therefore should be judged by the standard of their age. This, however, will not entirely settle the matter. Even judged by the standard of that

rude age, it cannot be supposed that a gross outrage on the sacred duties of hospitality—always so jealously guarded in the East—should have been condoned, nay, gloried in. We cannot rightly weigh either the conduct of the treacherous murderess or the words of the fierce prophetess until, by an effort of the historical imagination, we have placed ourselves in their situation of a magnificent triumph following hard on a wild terror. No book in the Bible will be more grievously abused if it is read as an absolute revelation for all time than the Book of Judges; no book more strongly demands the historical method for the interpretation of it.

2. *Samuel and Kings.*—The narratives of the early days of David, containing as they do two apparently irreconcilable accounts of his introduction to Saul,—the earlier, in which he is an acknowledged warrior when he is sought as a musician for the king (1 Sam. xvi. 14–23), the second, in which the king first makes his acquaintance as the stripling who fights Goliath (chap. xvii. 12–14, 55–58),—show that we are still in an historical region of some perplexity. But the mists are rapidly clearing, and before long we are able to follow the narratives of the kings of Judah and Israel with little difficulty. The books of Kings were written near the time of the Exile; but the author refers to some of his authorities by name, mentioning the *Book of the Acts of Solomon* (1 Kings xi. 41), the *Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah* for the southern kingdom, naming the latter no less than fifteen times, and

the *Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel* for the history of the northern kingdom, citing this as many as seventeen times. These books would probably have been contemporary annals. The frequent reference to them may lead us to two conclusions: (1) that the historian was careful to obtain authentic information, and (2) that his inspiration did not authorize him to dispense with the humble task of collecting materials to which the secular historian has resort, and therefore, it is reasonable to suppose, did not lift him in all respects above the limitations of his fellow-laborers in the difficult field of historical research.

The line of thought that runs through the two books of Kings is in sympathy with that of the Book of Deuteronomy. It is in the vein of the prophets. As we consider its character in this respect we may be prepared to recognize the true inspiration of the books and its wonderful effects. These works are not bare annals. They are not like such simple narratives as we meet with in "the father of history," Herodotus; nor are they like the philosophic history in which political principles are traced out, as in Thucydides. The great feature of the Hebrew history is the unique inspiration of insight into the moral and spiritual truths that emerge throughout the course of events. The writers help us to see God in history, because they themselves have discovered Him there. When it is asked, "Why should we study the story of these two little kingdoms of a remote past? and would it not be more profitable to save the time spent upon them for the much larger nations of Europe, nearer to our own times?" the

answer will not be easy if it is confined to the merits of what may be called the "secular" study of history. The value of what is rightly named "sacred" history does not lie so much in the religious nature of the events with which it is concerned as in the religious treatment of those events, many of which are of a very ordinary character—that is to say, in the fact that it is history written by prophets, by men inspired with spiritual insight.

This fact should guide us in the study of the books. Everything has been done that could be done to destroy the sacred character of this history by treating it in the dreary way in which the history of other nations than Israel is too commonly treated. Lists of kings, battles, dates, etc., belonging to a not very numerous people, who lived more than 2000 years ago at the extreme east of the Levant, cannot well excite great interest in the minds of busy Englishmen to-day. It may be of some significance for the researches of the antiquarian to discover that the chronology of Israel can now be tested by an Assyrian list of dates that has come down from contemporary ages, and that the result is a general agreement with the Old Testament dates, though with divergences that show those dates to have been inaccurate in some instances. But the religious value of the books does not lie in this direction. If we would study them as parts of the Bible, that is to say, if we would study them with a view to any of the exalted ends for which we resort to the Bible, we must make it our business to seek for the spirit in which they were written, in order that we may perceive the

moral and spiritual lessons they were designed to teach, and thus learn to come to understand the divine principles that apply to public and national affairs as much in Europe to-day as they applied in Palestine of old.

3. *Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah.*—These books originally formed one work. They are almost the latest books of the Old Testament, dating from the time of the Macedonian empire, after the conquests of Alexander the Great. Chronicles is founded on the books of Kings. It is written in the priestly spirit. Where the two narratives diverge we must certainly prefer the older one for an exact report of the history. The interest of Chronicles, therefore, is not historical. The book is valuable on account of its very differences from Kings, because in the comparison between the two we are able to perceive very clearly what the priestly standpoint is and how it differs from the prophetic. Ezra and Nehemiah break up new ground, and they take their place among the most authentic histories, relying on contemporary records, and to a large extent simply reproducing them in the very words in which they were written.

III. THE PROPHETS.

No portion of the Old Testament has been more frequently misunderstood and misapplied than that which contains the writings of the prophets. Many passages are obscure and even misleading as they appear in the Authorized Version, and therefore it is of imperative importance to make use of the Revised Version, in

which, happily, a number of the rough places are made smooth. But it is not merely a question of rightly translating and construing the sentences. The interpretation of the prophecies has been sadly astray.

1. *The Evidences of Prophecy.*—"Too often the only object of the Christian advocate has been to gather out of the various books of the Old Testament a collection of isolated texts, irrespective of context, date, or contemporary history, and to fit these together into a mosaic picture, the original design of which was previously sketched out with a conscious reference to the narratives and doctrines of the New Testament. Such a method is radically defective. It is inevitable that the idea of the object in view will color the mind of the inquirer so as to make it impossible for him to carry on a fairly impartial investigation. We are therefore prepared to find that those commentators who have pursued this method most unreservedly have started with the boldest assumptions, and ended by landing themselves in the most glaring absurdities. But even when these extremes are avoided there can be no doubt that the passion for discovering coincidences solely as coincidences must blind our eyes to the inherent worth of the truths concerned, just as too great attention to the rhyme of a poem hinders us from appreciating its thoughts. This method must also lead to a disproportionate treatment of the several prophecies, often quite reversing their relative order of importance. Minute predictions, exact in detail like Dutch paintings, no matter how insignificant their substance if only their

forms are clearly defined, will necessarily be preferred to the greater truths.

"But now a more accurate process of exegesis is showing that some of the most famous instances of correspondence between prediction and fulfilment are superficial and accidental, while others are seen to be so doubtful that they must lose all force in the controversy for which they were formerly prized as choice weapons. In one case the coincidence is discovered to consist in a merely verbal correspondence, based on a translation which must have been made with more regard for New Testament history than Old Testament grammar; in another the language points so plainly to contemporary events that this reference can only be ignored so long as we keep our eyes closed to the facts of ancient history." Nevertheless, "the dissolution of the mechanical relation between the ideas of prophecy and the facts and doctrines of Christianity is really doing good service to the cause of Christian truth, by directing more attention to these ideas themselves and their deeper vital union with the later revelation. If we are led to attach less value to the agreement between superficial details, we are called to bow before the transcendent majesty of the essential truths."*

2. *History and Prophecy.*—We can never come to a true understanding of these ancient prophecies unless we apply the historical method to the study of them. Our first requisite is to know who wrote them, when they were written, and what were the circumstances

* "The Hebrew Utopia," by the author.

under which they were put forth. The prophets, let us always remember, were the preachers of their day, and the true preacher must speak to the times. Assuredly the Hebrew prophets did so. In dealing with political questions they took the place of the modern leader-writer in the newspaper, although they raised their topics high above the region of party politics, viewing them in the light of God's will and judging them according to the standard of divine righteousness. It was by no means their chief aim to lift the veil from the countenance of the dim future. They did predict, it is true, both judgment and redemption; but their predictions for the most part related to the immediate future, and the larger proportion of their teaching was concerned with the present troubles, needs, sins, duties, and hopes of the people to whom they preached. The prophet was primarily God's messenger, the apostle of Old Testament times. His peculiar office was to speak for God, to give God's message to the people; and that message more often concerned the present than the future. The kernel of it was a revelation of eternal truth. Thus Amos leaves his herds and his vines in the south country, and comes up to the court of the famous King Jeroboam II. at Bethel, to denounce the corruption that abounds in that scene of dissolute luxury, and to point to the plague of locusts and other disasters as chastisements from the hand of God. A century later Isaiah, a great statesman as well as a preacher of righteousness, like one of the capable abbots and archbishops of the middle ages, guides the counsels of Hezekiah at a grave national crisis, when Jerusalem

is threatened by foreign enemies, showing his political insight in perceiving that the awful power of Assyria —now just looming on the horizon—is far more dangerous than the neighboring confederation of Israel and Syria, and shaping the sublime policy of isolation with trust in the protection of Jehovah, by which alone the city could be saved. Another century, and we have Jeremiah perceiving the approaching ruin, to which the infatuated king and his infatuated people are blind, while false, flattering prophets throw dust in their eyes, and then, though execrated as a traitor for counseling the wise course of submission to the inevitable, announcing a new and better covenant, that is to take the place of the old outworn covenant, which the Jews have dishonored by their faithlessness and which can no longer serve as the charter of their safety. Then, in the Exile, Ezekiel beholds his visions of providence and a reformed temple service, visions that help to bring about the reform at the return from Babylon. Toward the end of the Captivity we come upon a wonderful collection of inspired utterances, which has been preserved with the prophecies of Isaiah—from the fortieth chapter onward—and which, steeped in the atmosphere of the Exile as it is, is designed to comfort the captives with promises of approaching deliverance. After the Return we see Haggai cheering the toilers at the rebuilding of the temple, and a hundred years later Malachi blaming the Jews for their negligence of the restored temple service, as well as for other signs of declension that have crept in by his time, and warning of new judgments yet to fall on the unfaithful people.

In all these cases—and they are but specimens—we see that the prophecy had immediate bearings on the people to whom it was addressed, as the living message of the preacher to his age. Therefore it can only be understood when read in this connection. In this way we must study the prophets, if we are not to be wholly mistaken as to what they are aiming at. But then, how can the prophecies be used for the benefit of ourselves and our own times? Certainly not by giving to them a new and artificial meaning. That is the vicious process by which the Bible is made to teach anything, and therefore as a just revenge made to teach nothing, because it is converted into a mere mirror of the reader's prejudices. And yet we need not be content with reading the prophecies of the Old Testament simply as studies in ancient history. In that case the results would be meager indeed, though they might be sober and sound. The ancient utterances are of value to us chiefly because they contain truths for our own times—truths from which we ourselves can extract the very juice and marrow of divine revelation. There is no inconsistency in this position. Transitory events may illustrate eternal truths. It is the glory of Hebrew prophecy that it rises above the petty details of external circumstances and carries its themes up into the realm of the divine. It was just by pursuing this lofty course that the prophets endeavored to elevate both the political and the private life of Israel. But what they did in these respects for their own day they did for our day also and for all time. Because they reached those eternal truths which are above the shifting tides of time,

we read them to-day for the sake of the great lessons they contain, and find in them, fresh and living, the very principles that are most needed to set right our life. But then, this modern application of the ancient teachings of the Hebrew prophets is not an excuse for ignoring their historical setting, because they can only be understood aright as they are seen in that setting. Like the string that holds down the kite, and yet without which it would fall to the ground, the connection with limited historical events, which in our impatience we may be tempted to think a hindrance, is essential to the soaring of the prophecies into the higher regions. We must first know the historical meaning in order rightly to perceive the divine truth contained in it.

3. *Messianic Prophecy.*—Naturally, Christians have always regarded the prophecies that foreshadow the coming of the Messiah as the most precious heritage they have received from the Old Testament. This was the case in the preaching of the apostles and in the writing of the New Testament. It is illustrated emphatically in St. Peter's sermons reported in the Acts of the Apostles, and in the Gospels of Matthew and John, where we have repeated citations from the prophets, with claims of the fulfilments of their predictions in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But now, does it not seem that the new historical reading of the prophecies must be robbing them of their peculiar value as witnesses to Christ? In attempting to answer this question, it would be well to divide the prophecies that are regarded as Messianic into two

classes: first, those that were intended from the beginning to predict the coming of the Messiah, or at least the coming of the deliverance and blessedness that the Jews were led to associate with the Messianic age; and, second, those which, though written with no such reference, nevertheless contain truths of a Messianic character.

(1) All through the history of Israel, but especially in the latter reaches of it, there runs a golden thread of hope for some glorious future, and in Jeremiah we have the prediction of the New Covenant—a prediction that is only fulfilled by Christianity. Without going into an induction of passages we cannot gather up the strength of the evidence; but it can scarcely be denied that the hope for the Messiah that was found in Palestine and Samaria in the days of our Lord sprang from Old Testament prophecy. Genuine Messianic prophecy was spoken to cheer the contemporaries of the prophets, but in hope of a good time coming. It is no exception, therefore, to the principle that the prophets were preachers to their times.

(2) On the other hand, it must be confessed that a large proportion of the prophecies that Christians have been in the habit of applying to Jesus Christ do not appear to have this reference when they are taken in their historical connection. Thus the new way of reading the Bible seems to be impoverishing it in the matter of one of its most important elements. For example, it has been customary to take as simply intended for Jesus Christ the famous prediction, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name

Immanuel" (Isa. vii. 14). But as we read on we find that during the infancy of the child the ravages of war are to put a stop to agriculture, so that he will have to subsist on pastoral products and food that is gathered from the wild country—"Butter and honey shall he eat" (verse 15). Before he has reached years of discretion the war will be over, and the two powers that Ahaz so much dreaded, Israel and Syria, will collapse —"The land whose two kings thou abhorrest shall be forsaken" (verse 16, R. V.). Then, though we find the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah repeatedly applied to our Lord in the New Testament, and commonly regarded among Christians as a prophecy of the passion, a careful perusal of the whole composition in which it appears shows that "the servant of the Lord" of whom the sufferings in this chapter are predicated is the pious remnant of the Jews, or perhaps some persecuted prophet, such as Jeremiah. Are we, then, to conclude that the Messianic application of these very famous passages, and of others that demand a similar application to local and contemporary personages and events, is a pure delusion? It has been customary to seek an escape from this disappointing conclusion by means of the theory of double interpretation. A first application to immediate circumstances is acknowledged, and then the words are read in a secondary sense with reference to Christ. The difficulty in the way of this theory is that there is nothing in the prophecies themselves to indicate it; it was simply invented to restore the Messianic meaning that had slipped out of them. What is this but the mischievous process of bringing to Scrip-

ture an idea of our own, and then contriving a plan for inserting it into the sacred text? This may be ingenious; it is not exegesis.

But now a third position may be taken up, one that retains the simple historical meaning of the prophecies as their only meaning, and yet perceives the Messianic character of them. The ideas are Messianic. If they were realized in the immediate connection, which was all that the prophets contemplated, they still admit of subsequent realization under other circumstances, and if those other circumstances should prove to be more favorable, then a more perfect realization. Now, the wonderful thing about these prophecies is that they are not fully realized where the prophets expect their fulfilment, but are perfectly realized by Christ. The inspired thoughts are too great for the events with which the prophets connect them; the goodness of God is too wide for the imagination of man, even for the inspired imagination of a prophet. One point after another is fixed for the coming of the great hope; and though it is passed without a satisfactory fulfilment, the disappointment, instead of yielding to despair, only gives birth to greater promises at the next stage. One hero after another is hailed with acclamation; now it is Hezekiah, now Cyrus, now Judas Maccabæus; none of them realize all the hopes that are set upon them, and the prophecies are still lacking their perfect fulfilment, when Jesus comes and gathers up into Himself all that was so imperfectly accomplished in the past, thus in the truest sense fulfilling prophecy, just as He fulfilled the law, by carrying it up to perfection and developing its

latent ideas in a glory never dreamed of by their authors.

This, then, would seem to be our right course in the study of "Messianic prophecy," with which, as with all other prophecy, we must get to know the historical meaning of the passage, as part of a preacher's message to his contemporaries. From that we shall discover the essential idea. Then, turning our thoughts to Jesus Christ, we shall see how this idea is perfectly realized in His life and work as it had never been realized under the circumstances contemplated by the prophet.

See J. N. Smith, "Prophets of Israel"; Riehm, "Messianic Prophecy"; Briggs, "Messianic Prophecy."

IV. THE PSALMS.

Among Christian readers the Psalter is the favorite and most familiar book of the Old Testament, and naturally and rightly so; for here we touch those deep regions of personal religion where church and sect, where creed and rite, where race and place and time, are all lost sight of, merged in the common experience of the human soul all the world over, when once it truly lives in the very presence of God. In this part of the Bible, then, it might be thought, at all events, local and temporary matters could be disregarded and the sacred words read in their natural simplicity as always available for the devout man's meditation. But a little thought will teach us that even in the reading of the Psalms we cannot afford to neglect that indispensable key to the interpretation of Scripture, the historical method.

The Psalms are the sacred lyrics of Israel. Two important considerations spring from this fact, one touching the poetical form, the other the historical setting, which even here is found to be present.

1. *Hebrew Poetry.*—In reading the Psalms we must always bear in mind the distinctions between prose and poetry. What is called "the poetic license" allows of expressions in the freer imaginative literature that would not be tolerated in grave narrative or severe argumentation. This does not imply that we are not to look for truth in poetry. The obligation of sincerity is as imperative here as anywhere else. Indeed, it is possible by means of poetry to reveal deeper truth and to paint it more vividly than in prose. But then, the form of expression must be recognized. Poetry allows of a wealth of metaphor that is not permissible in good prose, and in Oriental poetry especially there is a daring employment of imagery which goes beyond anything we meet with in good Western literature, the best of which is guided by the restraints observed in the classic severity of the Greeks. Thus, as nature is supposed to rejoice at the deliverance of Israel, it is said:

> The mountains skipped like rams,
> The little hills like young sheep.—Ps. cxiv. 4.

We are bound to recognize this exuberance of lively metaphor in obvious instances; but for a just interpretation of Hebrew poetry we should be on our guard when it is not so apparent. It is here that a dull literalism plays havoc with the fancies of the inspired

writers. Verses from some highly poetic psalm are cited side by side with grave laws in Leviticus or argumentative passages from St. Paul's epistles, as though all belonged to the same category and all required the same rules of exegesis. But poetical things must be poetically discerned. This rule, of course, applies to poetry in other parts of the Bible—in the prophets, for instance.

2. *The Imprecatory Psalms.*—Just in proportion as the literature we are studying is subjective and emotional it becomes necessary for us to take account of the life and character and outlook of the writer. This applies with great force to the imprecatory psalms. Nothing is more confusing to the conscience than the idea that the horrible utterances of these psalms must be justified, and even appropriated by Christians under certain circumstances, for no other reason than that they are found within the covers of the Bible. Only evil can come from attempting to defend such words as these:

> O daughter of Babylon, that art to be destroyed;
> Happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee
> As thou hast served us.
> Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones
> Against the rock.—Ps. cxxxvii. 8, 9.

It is horrible to think that the crusaders under Godfrey de Bouillon—Christians as they thought themselves—performed this very barbarity on the children of the Saracens after the siege of Jerusalem. Read absolutely, and taken to be part of the sacred oracles, the impre-

catory psalms attribute to God as the divine Author of the Bible sentiments that are quite contrary to His character. If we met them anywhere else than in the Bible, what could we say but that they were wild, wicked words? Are they to be justified simply because they are found in the Bible? To say "Yes" would be to admit a most dangerous doctrine. It is not the function of inspiration to make wrong right. The honest thing is to say that these words should never have been written. And yet we may do a cruel injustice to the psalmist if we, with our Christian light, and living in ease and calm security, sit in judgment on a Jew of the old times, driven frantic with his people's wrongs, and condemn him by our own standard of right and wrong. The dreadful words show how the milk of human kindness may be turned to gall in a patriot's heart, wrung by the sight of the outrages done to his oppressed nation. When we study the whole situation a fuller comprehension of it may lead us to pause before we pass too severe a sentence on the offender; his offense was but in words, while that of the people he hated so intensely consisted of the very deeds that he was wishing to come upon them and their children. So much may be said in mitigation of the horror of this language; but even after all allowance has been made that can be made from the historical standpoint, a dark shadow rests on these psalms. It must be a most improper thing to repeat them in Christian worship. Let us be thankful that they are quite rare exceptions to the general tenor of the Psalter. Taking the Psalms as a whole, we may well be amazed and awed at the eleva-

tion of soul that marks them as among the choicest fruits of inspiration.

In studying any particular psalm it is desirable to begin by inquiring when it was written. The titles of the psalms are very misleading, and not to be relied upon, for they are late additions to the Psalter; therefore the date of any given psalm can only be fixed by its contents. For example, some psalms evidently refer to the Captivity and must be dated about the same time. Those written in praise of the law, such as the one hundred and nineteenth, must come after Ezra's publication of the Pentateuch. When we have obtained all the light that is to be got in this way we shall feel the more strongly that it is the unique merit of the Hebrew Psalter to be the expression of the language of devotion for all ages.

See Lowth, "The Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews"; Perowne, "The Book of Psalms"; Cheyne, "The Book of Psalms."

V. THE WISDOM LITERATURE.

A distinct class of literature, to which the name *Chokhmah*, or "Wisdom," was given, appears toward the end of Old Testament times. It embodies for the most part a gnomic wisdom, a practical and proverbial form of thought. In studying it we have to recognize that it is aided by a certain inspiration, but an inspiration of an inferior order compared with that which fires the enthusiasm of a prophet or that which breathes its sweetest music into the song of a psalmist. It is here, therefore, especially that we have to acknowledge

that there are differences of degree and differences of kind to be observed in the inspiration of various parts of the Bible. This is another reason for not quoting "texts" indifferently from various parts of Scripture, as though they were all of equal value. It is not reasonable to set a phrase from Proverbs or Ecclesiastes against one from Isaiah or St. John, as though they were of equal authority. The "wisdom literature" is characterized by shrewdness rather than by depth of spiritual insight; it is ethical rather than religious, and its ethics are often of the prudential order and rarely rise to the rank of the highest principles of conduct. This literature is represented in the Old Testament by three books—Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job. The finest works of Jewish literature outside the canon—the Book of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus—also come into the same category.

1. *Proverbs.*—The Book of Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings from various sources. How many of them actually have come down from Solomon it is impossible to say. The book itself testifies to a collection made by "the men of Hezekiah" (Prov. xxv. 1), and it closes with two appendices from other sources, *The Words of Agur* (xxx.) and *The Words of King Lemuel* (xxxi.). As we know so little of the origin of these aphorisms, they must be taken on their own merits; but this is just what is always expected in the case of a proverb. It may be said that the proverb differs from the law essentially in the source of its authority. The law depends on the authority of the lawgiver, the

proverb on its own inherent reasonableness. We must *see* the proverb, *perceive* its inherent truth and rightness, if it is to exercise any authority over us.

The Book of Proverbs has been censured for what has been regarded as its want of elevation in tone. It walks very soberly on the solid earth; its pages are rarely freshened by the breezes from the everlasting hills that spread life and joy over other books of the Bible. Nay, some of its maxims seem to be positively narrow, worldly, selfish. They have the odor of the market rather than the perfume of the sanctuary. Thus mere self-regarding prudence seems to dictate repeated warnings against suretyship, such, for example, as this:

> My son, if thou art become surety for thy neighbor,
> If thou hast stricken thy hands for a stranger,
> Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth,
> Thou art taken with the words of thy mouth.—Prov. vi. 1, 2.

But now, it cannot be denied that the prudence commended in various ways in the Proverbs is in accordance with the dictates of common sense, and it may be questioned whether on the whole a quixotic disregard of the maxims of common sense does not produce more misery than happiness in the world, and that even among the thriftless people who are indiscriminately assisted, often only to their own ultimate ruin. This question, however, may be left to be discussed by the social economists. When we take the Book of Proverbs as a whole we must admit that it makes for a sound morality. Its advice is in sharp contrast to the sinister principles that seem to regulate the life of

men of the world. Were they applied to business affairs to-day they would bring about a perfect revolution, a true cleansing of the "Augean stables." Here everything is absolutely upright, perfectly straightforward, conceived in strict integrity, scouting all lies and trickery. Is it nothing that we have laid down in this book the rules of a clean, true, honest life? Take, for example, the proverb:

> Better is the poor that walketh in his integrity
> Than he that is perverse in his lips and is a fool.—xix. 1.

Or this:

> A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches,
> And loving favor rather than silver and gold.—xxii. 1.

Not a few of the proverbs rise to much higher regions; for example, the words quoted by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans (xii. 19, 20), which read more like the teachings of Jesus Christ than an extract from such a book as the Proverbs:

> If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat;
> And if he be thirsty, give him water to drink:
> For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head,
> And the Lord shall reward thee.—xxv. 21, 22.

Lastly, in its exaltation of wisdom as the supreme requisite of life the book is continually lifting its readers above base thinking and base living—most strikingly so in the great utterance:

> The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.—i. 7.

2. *Ecclesiastes.*—This book has little, if any, of the exaltation of tone that emerges so often from among

the prudential maxims of the Proverbs. Perhaps no book of the Bible is more unsuitable to be used as a collection of "texts" to be quoted as absolute truths of revelation. The very form of the work forbids this treatment. There is a continuous thread of thought running through it, and we cannot understand the several parts except we read them in the light of the whole. One after another the leading pursuits of life are tried, but always with the same result, that each is discovered to be delusive and disappointing. In every case the verdict is, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." No matter where we turn, to the life of pleasure, to the pursuit of knowledge, to the greed of wealth, to a smug moderation—it is always the same tale, disillusion and disappointment. Nothing can be more melancholy. The book is steeped in pessimism. A new turn is taken in the last two verses, and since we here find a wholesome antidote to all that precedes, some have thought that the pessimism of the body of the book was simply intended to lead up to this noble conclusion, so that, as with the lesson of the parable of the Pearl of Great Price, or the experience St. Augustine narrates in his *Confessions*, the bitterness of the earlier dissatisfaction is seen to be swallowed up and wiped out in the final attainment. But it is probable that these last verses were added to Ecclesiastes by a later hand, and are not to be reckoned as an integral part of the work. If so, the book as it came from its author is pessimistic from beginning to end. Then it can only be read as a study of one mournful phase of life. Taken in this way it has a certain warning value.

3. *Job.*—This great poem, magnificent in its language and noble in many of its ideas, belongs essentially to the "wisdom literature," because it is a sort of theodicy, "justifying the ways of God to man." It is cast in the form of a drama—not, indeed, that it was intended to be acted; the theater was unknown to the Jew of ancient times, and there is very little action in the poem; but it is in the form of dialogue with a background of events.

Now this needs to be recognized in studying the book or any portion of it. We cannot take its various phrases by themselves; we must note in each case who the speaker is and what position he is intended to represent. Thus we have not only to take account of the real personality of the writer, as in the case of other books of the Bible; we have also to consider the imaginary personality of each of the characters in the drama. It would be very absurd to take the cruel falsehoods of Iago for the sober opinions of Shakespeare, or the cynical suggestions of Mephistopheles as representing the personal convictions of Goethe; and it would be no less absurd to quote harsh phrases from the speeches of Eliphaz the Temanite, B ldad the Shuhite, or Zophar the Naamathite, as simply so many "texts of Scripture," to be received on authority as parts of "God's word." When we reach Elihu we seem to perceive that the author has more sympathy with the language of this new character—a character which some believe to have been added by a later writer. Though he is conceited and pretentious, the clever young man gives utterance to some truly great thoughts, which commend them-

selves to us on their own merits. Still, while free from the prejudices that entangle the three miserable "comforters," Elihu also comes under condemnation at last, and Job, too, is rebuked for his presumption and impatience. Therefore the only part of the book that can be taken as setting forth absolute truth is that in which God is represented as speaking, and even there the language is adjusted to the whole situation and can only be fairly appreciated when that situation is first considered. The Revised Version is a great help in the study of the Book of Job. But even with the best translation in our hands we are troubled at times with the obscurities of this very difficult book. Still, if it be read right through and the distinction between the several speakers carefully observed, so that each speech falls into its proper place, we must be struck with the grandeur of the whole poem, one of the finest poems in the world's literature. Read in this way, too, the book cannot fail to suggest thoughts of profound significance on the terrible problem of evil and the profound mystery of providence.

VI. THE REMAINING BOOKS.

Three books still call for passing notice on account of something peculiar in the treatment they require. These are the Song of Songs, Daniel, and Esther.

1. *The Song of Songs.*—This book has received the most fantastic treatment, first at the hands of the Jews, and then from Christians. The Jews have read it as an

allegory of the history of Israel. From the time of Origen—who set the unfortunate example for succeeding commentators—Christian writers have seen in it a parable of the relations of Christ and His people. This entirely groundless interpretation is supported by the chapter headings in our English Bibles, which uninstructed readers naturally assume to be correct and perhaps accept as part of the genuine Scriptures. When we have courage to abandon the vicious habit of reading our own thoughts into the Bible and take this book up without prejudice, we must acknowledge that from first to last it drops no hint that it is to be interpreted in a "spiritual" way. Nor have we any justification in the New Testament for so regarding it; it is not so much as referred to in the New Testament. The only interpretation that comes honestly out of the text is that which sees in it a celebration of human love. It is either a collection of marriage songs found among the people of Galilee, or an epithalamium in celebration of a king's wedding, or, as seems more probable, a drama in which a noble-hearted maiden resists all temptations to enter the royal harem and proves herself faithful to her shepherd lover. Thus it is a protest in favor of simple manners and an encomium of loyal love.

2. *Daniel.*—The peculiarity about this book is that it is now proved to have been written some 400 years after the times to which it refers. While we may believe that Daniel was a real person and that the book is founded on traditions of his life, it cannot be read

as history. Still, it is most valuable for the grand lessons it sets forth on the martyr's faithfulness and on God's care for His servants in their hour of greatest danger.

3. *Esther.*—This, too, is not history, though it may be founded on a true tradition. It is a sort of historical novel, and it is not without value for the light it throws on the condition of the Jews during the later part of the Persian period. While the Jews have prized it as the pledge of their triumph over their oppressors, and sometimes made an unholy use of it in feeding the spirit of revenge, Christians have seen in the book, which never once names the name of God, a picture of providence implying in every line of it that God is protecting His people.

For commentaries on the various books of the Old Testament, see Cassell's "Commentary for Schools," "The Cambridge Bible," and "The Expositor's Bible."

II. THE NEW TESTAMENT.

Misapprehensions about the Old Testament are unfortunate, but misapprehensions about the New Testament may be little less than disastrous. The earlier revelation is of value as a preparation for Christian truth; the later revelation is itself the setting forth of that truth. Happily, this more important study is not beset with the same difficulties that hamper the student of the Old Testament. The most common mistakes made in reading the Hebrew Scriptures arise from the

habit of importing into them a Christian meaning. Occupying the Christian standpoint, we are inclined to view everything therefrom, so that we cannot let the ancient writings speak for themselves. But when we reach the New Testament we find ourselves at home; here the Christian view is natural and right, and Christian ideas of the very essence of the subject.

Even in itself, quite apart from the personal equation that has to do with the reader's position, the problem of the New Testament is free from some of the most vexatious questions that cluster round the Old. We know where we start; there is no longer any question of origins in a distant antiquity; we are now in the daylight of a well-known historical period. All the books of the New Testament were written within a short space of time, probably all within about fifty years. The authors of most of them are known, and the circumstances of their origin are in most cases not difficult to discover.

Nevertheless, the New Testament has its difficulties, some of them of a very puzzling nature; and here, too, perverse methods of reading have brought in confusion where it need never have occurred. It becomes necessary, therefore, to see that we are following right methods in the study of these most precious writings of the fundamental charter of Christianity.

See Marcus Dods, "Introduction to the New Testament," and Adeney, "The Theology of the New Testament" ("Theological Educator"); McClymont, "The New Testament and its Writers"; Salmon, "Introduction to the New Testament"; Weiss, "Manual of Introduction to the New Testament."

I. THE GOSPELS.

The unique interest of the Gospels to us is that they witness of Jesus Christ, and therefore in our reading of these books our first aim must be to learn all they teach about our Lord and Saviour. This gives to the study of the Gospels a supreme value above that of any other study in the world, placing it foremost even among Biblical topics. Whatever other parts of the Bible we may select for favorite reading, or whatever other parts we may let fall into comparative neglect, we cannot give too much attention to these four accounts of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. This, then, is the first thing to be observed in regard to the study of the Gospels: it must have the place of preëminence among Biblical studies.

1. *The Portraiture of Christ.*—The Gospels are not so much biographies of our Lord as portraits. The evangelists did not aim at giving full, connected narratives, but rather at preserving important incidents and characteristic scenes, by means of which they might encourage faith. Reading them with due regard to the intention they follow, we have to see how they make Jesus Christ known to us.

A caution that has been felt necessary with other Biblical studies is here of paramount importance. It is most important to free our minds from all preconceptions and simply look at the four portraits by themselves, so that they may tell their own story. The

misleading course, one that is terribly common, is to read the Gospels through our own notion of what Jesus must have been, with the result, seen in all similar cases, that we miss the point of what we are reading. During nearly 2000 years Christian theology has been busy framing ideas of the nature of Him who has come to be regarded as "the second person of the Trinity." Accordingly, we have a theological Christ, remote and abstract, difficult to understand, still more difficult to trust and love. On the other hand, popular preaching and popular hymns have combined to make familiar to the people of our age a rather feeble picture, tender and gracious and winsome, but lacking the power and dignity of the true Christ. It will be an immense gain if we can turn from the abstract "second person" of the creeds and the romantic Jesus of popular ideas to the real Christ of the Gospels. We need a self-denying ordinance if we are to do this. For the time being we must forget our theology; we must put the hymns and the sermons and the popular religious books on the shelf; we must set ourselves down to read the Gospels with open minds, that they may tell their own tale. It is astonishing what a revelation this will be to some of us—little less than the discovery of a new Christ! The Gospels are like palimpsests; the ancient writing has been written over by generations of well-meaning doctors of the church. What they have done is very well in its way; only it is a thousand pities that it stands where it is. This must be scraped off; we must clear away all theological comments, all accompanying ideas that do not legitimately spring out

of the story, so that it shall lie open before us, for the first time truly legible, while we begin to read the Gospels just to learn what they have to tell us about Jesus Christ. Then we shall see the mingled grandeur and gentleness, the wonderful depth and the singular simplicity, the grace and the strength, the mercy that attracts sinners, the sincerity that scathes hypocrites, the majesty that awes all who are not blind to the glory revealed in the story of those wonderful years of the earthly ministry of Jesus.

2. *The Four Accounts.*—In the four Gospels we possess four distinct accounts of Jesus Christ. They are not altogether independent of one another. Probably both Matthew and Luke are largely based on Mark, and probably all three of the earlier Gospels were known to John. Still, each writer has his own principle of selection, each combines information of his own with what he borrows from the common stock, and each has his own way of regarding the subject he is writing upon. Thus we get diversity in the midst of unity.

A "harmony" of the Gospels is an attempt to arrange the several contributions of the four evangelists so that they shall all fall into their right places in a common story. This presents some difficulties; that it does so is apparent from the fact that the schemes of different students by no means agree together. Now, the temptation of the harmonist is to smooth away all differences between the accounts he has set himself to bring into line. But a strict regard for truth should put us on our guard against all such processes. Of

course it is only reasonable and right to explain difficulties where they admit of explanation, and where they do not at once appear to admit of explanation it is wise to be slow in pronouncing the divergences to be hopelessly irreconcilable. In some cases, if we knew more, it is very likely we should see a way of bringing together what now seem to us to be very divergent accounts. Still, it is not to be denied that there are some differences that cannot be reconciled. When we come across these we are bound to recognize them. Nothing but harm can come of the attempt to smother them with a cloud of vague phraseology.

For example, Matthew gives his narrative of the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem without a hint that Mary and Joseph had come from Nazareth (ii. 1), and later on introduces Nazareth as though it were first thought of as a refuge from the jealousy of Archelaus (ii. 23); but Luke shows how Mary and Joseph were residents of Nazareth (i. 26, 27), who were only on a visit to Bethlehem on the occasion of the census when Jesus was born (ii. 1–5), and who returned to their own city in due course (verse 39). Matthew gives the Sermon on the Mount as actually on the mountain (v. 1); Luke's account points to a plain (vi. 17), and his version of the words spoken by Jesus varies from that of the first Gospel. According to Mark, Jesus met and cured Bartimæus as He was going out of Jericho (x. 46); according to Luke, it was as He was entering the city (xviii. 35); according to Matthew, there were two blind men cured, the occasion being the same as in Mark, on the departure from Jericho (xx. 29, 30). After the resurrection, according to Matthew, the principal appear-

ances of Jesus to His disciples took place in Galilee, whither He had told them to go expecting to meet Him; according to Luke, they were in Jerusalem.

Now, it is possible in some of these cases, as well as with some others,—for these are but a few specimens out of many,—to effect a reconciliation. Thus the Sermon on the Mount may have been on a small level place in one of the hollows of the mount, or Jesus may have repeated it with some variations, so that in one evangelist we may have the first delivery of it and in the other evangelist the second. But this is not possible in every case. It has been suggested that Jesus may have cured one blind man on His entrance to Jericho and another on His departure. But the circumstances of the Jericho miracle are so peculiar, and yet are so nearly identical in each account, that we cannot take refuge in this simple explanation. In each report we have the first public confession of Christ, apart from the confessions of the demoniacs at an earlier period; and other peculiar details also agree. If we met the three accounts in three newspapers we should not hesitate for a moment to accept them as slightly variant narratives reporting the same incident. It is only a peculiar theory of inspiration that could ever tempt us to do otherwise in the case of the Gospels. But this twisting of the plain meaning of the sense of Scripture is really most fatal to faith in the sacred record, and it cannot be right if it is not true. We dare not sacrifice truth for what we regard as "safe," and in the long run an honest, straightforward recognition of these differences is the safest course.

It is the nervous attempt to explain away the differ-

ences that magnifies their importance and so makes stumbling-blocks of them. If they were calmly recognized as in no way disturbing, their comparative insignificance would soon be perceived. When we have admitted their existence to the full we have by no means endangered the narrative, much less have we in the least degree confused the portrait of Christ which it was the design of the evangelists to supply. The questions whether the family of Jesus came from Nazareth, whether the great sermon was preached on the top of a mountain or on a plain, whether there were two blind men cured at Jericho and whether the miracle took place at the entrance to the city or at the departure, whether Jesus was seen by His disciples in Galilee after the resurrection, or in Jerusalem, or both —these are all of very secondary importance. However we reply to them, the fundamental facts of the narratives referred to remain: Jesus was born, He left us the wonderful teachings of the famous sermon, He cured the blind, He rose from the dead, and was seen by His disciples. It is the same with divergences on other points. They do not in any way undermine the foundations of the faith or even remove important elements from the story of Jesus. Then is it not most reasonable to admit their presence without the slightest reserve and to proceed to sum up the mass of sure information that remains unshaken in spite of these sources of uncertainty concerning minor points?

3. *The Synoptics.*—The first three Gospels are commonly called "the synoptics," because they take a com-

mon view of the life-story of Jesus Christ. As we have just seen, they do not entirely agree; still, they have so much in common that they naturally go together. It is well, therefore, to study them together. Matthew has come to be the favorite Gospel, the one most read and best known. Familiar quotations of incidents or sayings are in the words of this Gospel in preference to either of the others, even when they are found in all three. So common is this practice that some impoverishment of the evangelical records has resulted, and we really do not gain the full advantage of the varieties of narration. It would be a clear gain, therefore, if the less systematic Bible readers would leave Matthew for a time and turn their attention to Mark or Luke.

Each Gospel has its own special advantages to offer the student. Mark is best for the narratives, and that on two grounds. (1) Mark is the earliest Gospel. As the others are largely founded on it, we are nearer the source when we read this Gospel. Where they differ, other things being equal, it is natural and reasonable to prefer the primitive account. (2) Mark is most graphic. The narratives in the second Gospel are usually the most full and explicit. St. Mark has a love for detail and an eye for color; or, if we are not to attribute the interesting character of his Gospel entirely to the writer, St. Mark's close contact with St. Peter has enabled him to convey some of the vivid impressions that the incidents he narrates made upon an eye-witness.

Matthew and Luke have the advantage over Mark of preserving more of the teachings of Jesus, but with a

difference. In Luke these teachings are more often given in connection with the incidents out of which they arose. These incidents often throw light on the meaning of the words spoken by our Lord. The occurrence of the teachings in what we may call their original setting points to the probability that St. Luke has preserved them in their original form. This fact may lead us to give a certain preference to Luke over Matthew. On the other hand, Matthew has reported the teachings of Jesus with the greatest fullness. This, then, gives a certain advantage to Matthew.

Putting these facts together,—Mark's graphic accounts of the facts, Luke's association of the teaching with the incidents, Matthew's copious rendering of the sayings of Jesus,—we can see how fortunate it is that we have the three parallel accounts, and how desirable it is that we should give due attention to each instead of attaching ourselves too exclusively to any one favorite.

This applies to the common matter in the three Gospels. But each Gospel has its own special contributions to offer. Luke has one large section in particular peculiar to himself—that which includes the parable of the Prodigal Son. Lastly, as each writer has his own aims and manifests to some extent his own sympathies, each gives a specific form and tone to his narrative. Mark is objective, dealing with facts, but he evidently delights in setting forth the glorious power of Jesus, whom at the outset he acknowledges to be the Son of God (i. 1). In particular he shows Christ's mastery over the powers of evil in the cure of demoniacs. Luke

delights to dwell on the tenderness of the Healer, the compassion of the Saviour, the all-comprehensiveness of the Redeemer. Matthew has his Jewish readers in mind, as he points to the fulfilment of prophecy. With him the prophet character of Jesus as the great Teacher is especially precious. Thus each has his own aspect of the Gospel to bring before us, and each must be studied if we are to obtain a full view of the whole subject.

4. *The Fourth Gospel.*—It is evident even to the most superficial reader that the Gospel according to St. John stands by itself. For the most part it covers different ground from that of the synoptics, narrating incidents that occur at Jerusalem, while they almost confine themselves to the Galilean ministry. The form of the language and the spirit pervading the Gospel are also peculiar and characteristic. In the historical portions the Gospel is interesting for its minuteness of detail, its careful notes of time and place, its very dramatic portraiture. Let it be compared with the synoptics where they cover the same ground, as is occasionally, though rarely, the case, and these features of the fourth Gospel will be at once apparent. Take, for instance, the narrative of the feeding of the multitude with the loaves and fishes, and the superior fullness and dramatic vividness of John will be seen in contrast with the other Gospel accounts of the same incident. In its discourses this Gospel has other very remarkable traits. It was once thought by some to give so different a version of the teachings of Jesus from that of the synoptics that

the two could not possibly be reconciled. But a more careful and critical examination of the book has led to a much more general acceptation of the conviction that, in its ideas and in the essence of the teaching of Jesus it records, this Gospel is not at variance with the earlier accounts. In the form of language, however, it certainly does stand by itself, and this quite as much in the discourses as in the narratives. Indeed, the same peculiar style that characterizes the narratives is found in the discourses. This is exactly the style of St. John's three epistles. It is found in the speeches of Christ; it is found in the speeches of John the Baptist; it is found in the comments by the evangelist. For example, in John iii. 10–21 we cannot well determine where the words of Jesus end and where the comment of the evangelist comes in; the style is just the same in both parts. Then, in verses 27–36 we have an equal difficulty in determining where John the Baptist's words end and where the evangelist's begin; here, too, the style is just the same as that of the earlier passage. If we turn to 1 John v. 11, 12, we come upon similar thoughts expressed in similar language. There is but one reasonable explanation of phenomena such as these. We must conclude that St. John has given his reminiscences of Jesus and the Baptist in his own words. No doubt he preserves much of the original language as well as the essential thought, for we often meet in the fourth Gospel with those piercing words that proclaim themselves none other than the utterances of One who "spake as never man spake." But the whole is viewed through the mind and experience of the apostle

who best knew the heart and soul of Jesus. The teachings of Jesus that he thus conveys to us are the most profound and precious. We go to the fourth Gospel for an introduction to the inner shrine of the glorious revelation in Christ.

5. *The Teachings of Jesus.*—These characteristics of the fourth Gospel lead us on to a consideration of the teachings of our Lord in themselves. As in coming to the study of the Gospels we have to remind ourselves that we are dealing with the most important part of the Bible, so now, in considering the Gospel accounts of the teachings of Jesus, we must acknowledge that we are sitting at the feet of the supreme Teacher. The fact, of course, is admitted at once by every Christian. But what should be the inevitable inference from it is commonly neglected with singular fatuity. Surely, with such a Teacher, the very least we should do is not to interrupt Him. Yet until recently it was rare to meet with a candid examination of the teachings of Jesus by themselves. They have usually been mingled with other Biblical statements, as though all were on a level, and then they have been read in the light—it would be more accurate to say the darkness—of subsequent ecclesiastical theology. Thus it has been very difficult to know what Jesus Christ actually taught. But now we must learn to avoid this lamentable confusion. Not only must all later theology be laid aside for the time being, even the apostolic teaching must be postponed, while we ask plainly, What did Jesus say? Our theology is for the most part based on the writings

of St. Paul. When we come to consider those writings it will be seen that serious attention is due to them as affording the deepest and richest exposition of the apostolic teaching. The church suffered grievously for centuries, owing to her neglect of these great epistles of the inspired apostle. But it has been too much the custom to come to the Gospels with a mind saturated with Pauline ideas and only to read them through the mind of St. Paul. This is the mistake we must now learn to avoid. To many the study of the actual teachings of Jesus, with a rigorous exclusion of all other elements, comes as a perfect revelation. It is astonishing that it should be so. But the mischievous habits of Biblical study that prevailed in the past are to be held responsible for the singular fact that some people in the nineteenth century seem to have made a new discovery for themselves in coming to know what Jesus taught.

Having reached what we believe to be the actual "truth as it is in Jesus," we are prepared to look at other truth as that also comes before us in the Christian revelation. In regard to this matter there are two considerations that need attention. First, we have no reason to assume that there is no Christian truth besides that which we have here. Jesus laid the foundation for His kingdom. He left it for His apostles to raise the walls and build the crowning pinnacles. Even their work was His work, for He was with them, and the Spirit He gave them was their inspiration. Still, this apostolic work was subsequent to the earthly life of our Lord, and could not have been included in the ministry that preceded His death and resurrection—the

two events on which the chief ideas of St. Paul's Gospel depend. Second, in considering subsequent teaching we must value it according to its agreement with this fundamental teaching of Jesus. Every writer must be explained in accordance with his own position and ideas. But the standard of judgment for the appreciation of all Christian teachers must be the ideas of the supreme Teacher. Thus the utterances of Christ in the Gospels occupy quite a place by themselves. As in the case of the earliest stage of the Biblical revelation, they must not be mixed up with the ideas that come in at subsequent stages. But then, though other ideas are to be admitted later, this must never be, as with the Old Testament revelation, to supersede the earlier ideas. In the case of the New Testament the early ideas are the supreme ideas, because they are the ideas of Jesus Christ. These can never be superseded. Whatever comes afterward, through the apostles, must be accepted as supplement and comment, very valuable and a genuine part of the Christian revelation, but still second in importance to the direct teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

6. *The Order of the Teaching.*—It is well, as far as possible, to study the teaching of Jesus in the order in which it came from Him. This chronological arrangement we have found to be desirable in other cases. Thus we are able to trace the development of ideas. Our Lord's ministry was so very short that we must not expect to find in it the same moving on of thought that is usual with teachings which cover a longer space

of time; and we cannot always be sure of the right chronological order, since the evangelists do not all keep to the same order. Some advance in teaching, however, we may discover. At first Jesus simply took up the Baptist's message, announcing the advent of the kingdom and calling to repentance. Then He declared that the kingdom had come. From these general declarations in His preaching He proceeded to teaching, in which He described the nature of the kingdom and the laws and principles that belong to it. In all the earlier teaching He said very little about Himself. Gradually He made Himself more known. At first He was not recognized by the people, or even directly confessed by His disciples, as the Messiah. The crisis at Cæsarea is signalized by St. Peter's confession on behalf of his brother disciples as well as for himself. Still the great truth is not declared to the people. The Messiahship is first publicly acknowledged by Bartimæus, and a little later Jesus makes His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, thus permitting His followers to hail Him as the Christ, a truth which He personally admits to the high priest at His trial. The occasion of St. Peter's great confession is seized by Jesus to make an important announcement. Up till then He had said nothing about His death. From this time He began to speak of it and to prepare His disciples for the approaching horror (Mark viii. 31). From this time, also, He began to impress on His disciples the doctrine of the Christian cross, of the necessity of renunciation of self and the bearing of the cross by all who would come after Him (verse 34).

We do not meet with such distinct marks of the development of the teaching of Jesus in the fourth Gospel. There it appears as though the full truth of the nature and mission of Jesus as the Son of God and the Christ had been declared quite early—one of the indications that St. John gives us the teachings of Jesus in the form of his own later reflections. Still, the difference from the synoptics in this respect is not so glaring as it has been represented. The early declarations of the Messiahship are not in public. Jesus admits to the woman of Samaria that He is the Christ (John iv. 26), but this is in a private conversation; and though He is publicly acknowledged a little later, it is by Samaritans (verse 42). Mark records an early acknowledgment by demoniacs; John records a similar acknowledgment by Samaritans. With John, also, as with the synoptics, Jesus makes no references to His death in the earlier part of His career. It is in John that a crisis is marked, where Jesus gives the hard teaching about eating His flesh and drinking His blood, which the evangelist tells us is followed by the falling off of many of His disciples (vi. 66). Thus even in this Gospel we have some hints of the progress of teaching through successive stages. We shall best understand the teaching of Jesus if we endeavor to trace it out in this order of development.

7. *Specific Ideas.*—There is yet another way in which it is desirable to study our Lord's teaching. This is to trace out His lessons on separate truths. Thus we can gather up all He says on the being and character of

God—His teaching on the spirituality of God, on the Fatherhood of God. With regard to this greatest of all subjects, we must recognize how much of the deepest teaching of Jesus comes to us in His own person and life. He who has seen Jesus has seen the Father; therefore a study of the character of Jesus will lead to some understanding of His revelation of God. Then, we can study the teaching of Jesus on His own divine and human natures, and on His mission as this is set forth in His discourses and as it is illustrated and confirmed in His life. Similarly, we can inquire what He teaches on the doctrine of redemption. It is important to know exactly what Jesus said about the significance of His death and the ransom He was to pay for the deliverance of men and women. The teaching of Jesus on the kingdom of God is a distinct branch of study of very great importance, as showing both the inwardness of this kingdom and yet its essentially social character. The ethics of the Sermon on the Mount and of teachings of Jesus even more powerful in example than in words, the warnings of future judgment, the institution of the Lord's Supper, and other topics, all invite separate, discriminating study.

8. *The Parables.*—So much of the teaching of Jesus is given in the form of parable that it becomes somewhat important for us to have a clear conception of the nature of this charming creation and of the right way to interpret it. A parable is always a word-picture in which truth is represented in the form of visi-

ble events; but sometimes this is of the most direct kind, without any secondary meaning. For example, the parable of the Good Samaritan is a story of what might have actually happened, and it teaches its lesson by way of direct illustration. The first part of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is much of the same character, and though it is not all to be taken as representing what occurs in the form set forth, still it gives an imaginary conversation in the realm of the dead, with no secondary meaning. But most of the parables are not of this nature. Most of them describe supposed occurrences in the external world to symbolize what takes place in another sphere. They have a literal meaning, but this is only to suggest an analogous process in mental or spiritual regions. Thus the story of the Prodigal Son holds together by itself as a perfect picture of a possible occurrence in the human world; but it is given to suggest another picture just like it, but depicting the relations between God and man. In interpreting these parables two important principles should be borne in mind.

(1) *The parable contains an argument from analogy.* It is more than an illustration. There is a close logical connection between the story and its lesson. It contains an appeal to known events as a proof that the unknown must be of a certain character, because they are essentially alike. We see something happening in the visible world. It has a parallel in what is happening in the spiritual world. Therefore the latter movement may be expected to take a course similar to the

former. We are always making religion unnatural; Jesus shows how natural it is. We expect unreasonable things in religion; Jesus reminds us of what is reasonable in our present experience, and argues that the same should be looked for in the realm of which as yet we know less. Thus He repeatedly begins a parable by an appeal to nature or custom or reason. "What man of you, having a hundred sheep," would not do such and such things? "What woman, having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece," etc. It is as much as to say, "You would not expect a certain unnatural or unreasonable thing to take place in the world of common experience; then why do you look for it in the other realm?" It is of the essence of a parable, therefore, that it should be natural and reasonable. Most of our Lord's parables narrate occurrences that may actually have happened, some, perhaps, such as the parable of the Sower, things actually taking place under the very eyes of the speaker and His audience. "Behold, a sower went forth to sow"; such a man might have been seen at work on the plain of Gennesaret, with the very varieties of soil that Jesus describes in the parable. Teaching such as this is vivid, realistic, coming straight home to the listener.

It is true the spiritual world is not entirely analogous to the world in which we live; it is higher and better. This, however, only gives the more force to the argument of the parables. It makes the reasoning *a fortiori*. If certain results are got amid the imperfections of earth, much more may we look for them in the perfection of heaven. This mode of argument is seen

in the parable of the Unjust Judge. If even such a man will be induced to give attention to a poor woman's complaint on the ground of her persistent pleading, how much more shall the just Judge and Father of us all attend to His children's cries!

(2) *The parable is designed to teach one primary lesson.* This is part of the difference between the parable and the allegory. The latter is longer and more elaborate; in its sinuous course it throws out a wealth of illustrations picturing a variety of ideas. The briefer parable is usually directed to one specific end. Accordingly, the key to its interpretation will be found in the discovery of this leading aim. It is generally a mistake to endeavor to derive a number of different lessons from any of our Lord's parables. We should be prepared to allow that many features are added merely to give color to the whole picture or to fill in the background, in order that the main lesson may be thrown up in relief. For example, in the story of the Prodigal Son we have no ground for supposing that the "best robe" represents the "imputed righteousness of Christ," any more than that the "fatted calf" represents some other element of the evangelical "plan of salvation." It is there, in all probability, simply in order to heighten the effect of the description of the joyousness of the welcome home. In the parable of the Wedding-Feast, on the other hand, so much prominence is given to the absence of a wedding-garment that it is evidently to be taken as a significant part of the subject. Sometimes the parable itself will reveal its own salient points and thus lead us to see what specific purpose it is intended

to serve; at other times we can discover this from the context, the previous conversation by leading up to it showing what the parable is intended to teach.

9. *The Aphorisms.*—Next to the parable the aphorism is the most frequent form in which our Lord presents His teaching to us. He would concentrate His ideas in short, pregnant sentences. The Beatitudes afford a familiar example of this kind of teaching. Like the parables, these proverbial utterances arrest attention and hold well to the memory. Like the parables, too, they tend to stimulate thought, and they require thought in order to be properly understood. They are essentially seed-thoughts. Evidently it was not the object of Jesus Christ to force His teaching upon unwilling listeners, or even to put it within the reach of the careless and indifferent. It is not well for us to receive truth without any effort on our own part. The truth which is of value to us is that which grows up for us in silent meditation, often but slowly and painfully. We must take some trouble with the great seed-thoughts of Christ. They need pains for the right understanding of them, and they are worth effort and patience.

Some of these aphoristic sayings are very puzzling at the first hearing of them. "If any man cometh unto Me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." That is a hard saying; so is this: "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye would say unto this sycamine-tree, Be

thou rooted up, and be thou planted in the sea; and it would have obeyed you." In reading such sayings we must allow for the freedom of the Oriental style, which is not bound down to the dull level of our Western prose. But this will not explain everything. It seems to have been the custom of Jesus Christ to state in an extreme way what He found it very hard to get people to appreciate in the least degree, in order that they might be forced to look at it, knowing that His hearers would always lag behind the truth in its due proportion.

We must not suppose that because these and the like sayings of our Lord are difficult, and call for much thought in the understanding of them, they must be reserved for very intellectual people. The common people heard Him gladly; and He thanked God that the greatest mysteries were hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes. Sympathy with the spirit of Christ is the secret of understanding His teaching. But this sympathy must induce a careful, thoughtful study of His words if their true meaning is to be discovered; and it will do so where it is genuine and deep.

10. *The Conversations.*—Much of the teaching of Christ was conveyed in conversation rather than in set discourse. Jesus did not only preach sermons; He talked with people, answering questions and putting questions of His own to those who approached Him. This is very apparent in the earlier part of John, but also to some extent in the later part of that Gospel,

although it is supposed to consist more of long discourses than the other Gospels. Accordingly, we must have the whole situation before us, in order that we may understand the conversational teachings of Jesus. For this reason we cannot do justice to those teachings by merely studying extracts of the words spoken by our Lord. In losing the dramatic scene we may miss the point of these words. The teaching of Jesus in the interview with Nicodemus or at Jacob's well can only be appreciated when we have the whole scene in view. Similarly, the controversies with scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees bring out important ideas in our Lord's teaching, which can only be seen aright as they appear in the dialogue. For this reason we must always study the teachings of Jesus in connection with the Gospel history, in spite of the fact that the truths He taught are eternal in their nature and as applicable to ourselves to-day as they were to the men and women of the first century.

For commentaries on the Gospels, see "The Cambridge Bible"; Cassell's "Commentary for Schools"; Gould, "St. Mark"; Westcott, "St. John"; Godet, Meyer, Lange, Morison. See also Bruce, "The Miracles," "The Training of the Twelve," and "The Kingdom of God"; Horton, Weiss, on "The Teaching of Jesus."

II. THE EPISTLES.

Evidently, since, as we have seen, it is important to take note of the circumstances under which the books we have already had under consideration were written,

the same rule must apply with added force to the epistles. By their very form these writings declare themselves to be of a specific personal and local character. They are letters. A letter implies a sender and a receiver; and we cannot do justice to it until we take into account the circumstances under which it was despatched. In a true letter the personality of the writer is always in evidence. The biographer recognizes this fact by collecting his hero's correspondence, and in some cases contenting himself with doing little more than adding a connective commentary. The man reveals himself in his correspondence. Thus we know St. Paul as we know no other character of apostolic times, because we have so many of his letters. Then, though there are such things as circular letters,—the Epistle to the Ephesians may be of this nature,—every genuine letter is drawn up with a distinct recognition of the sort of persons it is addressed to and the writer's relations to them. The letter that would be very suitable to send to one correspondent would be very unsuitable for another. Similarly, the special circumstances under which each letter was written and its specific object must characterize it throughout. From these facts we may deduce certain important conclusions as to the right way of studying the epistles.

1. *The Writer.*—The first step is to collect all necessary information as to the writer of the epistle we are about to make a subject of study. In the case of the Pauline epistles we have two sources of information, the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles themselves.

Professor Ramsay has recently vindicated the account of the travels and labors of the apostle in St. Luke's narrative. Where the epistles can be fitted into their places in the narrative, it is very helpful to read that narrative for the light it throws on them. Then, as we possess so many of St. Paul's epistles, we can use them to throw light on one another. It is well to make a study of all these epistles together, in order that we may learn the whole of the recorded teaching of the writer, and also that we may come to know the man himself. After doing so, when we read any one of St. Paul's epistles we can throw the light of our knowledge of the apostle and his teaching upon it. At all events, it is absolutely imperative that we should consider whose epistle we are reading, and not fling all our studies into confusion by taking no account of the question whether what we are reading comes from St. Paul or St. James or St. John. Such personal documents as letters must be closely associated with their writers. When we turn from St. Paul to St. James we find ourselves in an entirely different atmosphere. For St. James's epistle we need to collect all the information that is procurable about the leader of the Jewish Christians at Jerusalem. So, again, when we turn to the three short epistles of St. John it is quite clear that we have to do with a peculiar class of literature. These epistles should be read together and also in close connection with the fourth Gospel; they will shed light on the Gospel, and it in turn will help to explain them. Therefore let the Johannine writings be allotted a separate reading by themselves. It is study of this kind that makes it cer-

tain that the Epistle to the Hebrews could not have been written by St. Paul. The style and character of it are quite different from what we meet in the Pauline epistles. In this case, unfortunately, we cannot obtain light from the personality of the author; he is wholly unknown to us. 1 Peter may be well illustrated from our knowledge of the apostle in the Gospels and the Acts; the genuineness of 2 Peter is very doubtful. Of St. Jude we know but little, and his epistle is not important.

2. *The Readers.*—In the study of a correspondence, next to some knowledge of the writer, it is most important to be acquainted with the people to whom he is addressing himself. Any information that can be procured concerning the Galatian, the Corinthian, or the Roman Christians will be of the greatest service when we come to read the letters addressed to these communities. The relations of the apostle to his readers are also important factors. We must distinguish between his own converts, such as the Galatians and the Corinthians, and Christians who had been won by the labors of others and whom he had not so much as seen, such as the Romans. The direct personal treatment is natural with the former; in the case of the latter a certain restraint and a studious courtesy are natural to so true a gentleman as the apostle. Accordingly, we meet with these very distinctions of style and treatment in the different letters. The Galatians the apostle rates soundly for their fickleness, and the Corinthians he rebukes for their grave faults, but to the

Romans, perfect strangers except by repute, he is very polite and not so personal. This Epistle to the Romans is less of a letter and more like a set treatise than any other of St. Paul's writings, and the absence of personal connection with the readers explains the peculiarity of it in this respect.

St. Paul's epistles were addressed to churches consisting for the most part of converts from heathenism; St. James writes his letter for Jews. The Epistle to the Hebrews, as its title declares, is also composed for Jews. These facts must be remembered in reading the works. It is especially important in the case of the Epistle to the Hebrews, because the whole argument of the writer is closely related to the nationality of his readers; it is an *argumentum ad homines.* The Jewish Christians are consoled for the loss of their old privileges occasioned by their expulsion from the synagogue. They are shown that they have the reality of those privileges still, and, more than this, that even in respect to the very privileges they are better off than their brethren of the old religion; they have in a larger and richer and more solid way all that the Jews have in but an imperfect and shadowy form. Step by step, the argument of the epistle demonstrates this great truth with reference to one after the other of the ancient privileges of Israel. This will account for the form of the epistle, as well as for its essential thought. We may say for certain that the argument would not have been thrown into this form if it had not been addressed to Jews. From which position we may draw two conclusions: (1) To understand the epistle we must try to

enter into the Jewish mind and read it from a *Hebrew* Christian standpoint. Its allusions presuppose an intimate knowledge of the Old Testament. We must read it with the Old Testament before us. (2) We need not take its expressions quite absolutely as the very best for setting forth Christian truth. Best for the Jew, they may not always be best for the Christian. The truths themselves are of immense value to us, but we may feel free to recast them into a Gentile form. The epistle teems with allusions to the priestly system and to the arrangements of the tabernacle. It is almost exclusively from the Epistle to the Hebrews that these ideas have passed into Christian theology. Certainly they afford striking illustrations of Christian truth, especially in regard to the mystery of atonement. But we should remember that they are illustrations, and that they were first put forward for the benefit of Jews who clung to their old Levitical system. This fact should make us hesitate before asserting that they must keep the exact form and retain the same prominence for Christians of all ages. The fact of the atonement, if a fact at all, must ever be of transcendent importance; but the sacrificial imagery of the Epistle to the Hebrews need not bind the minds of Gentile Christians to one particular mode of regarding it.

3. *Chronological Position.*—In the next place, we must arrange these epistles in order of time. It is well to read them all through chronologically. By this means alone is it possible to trace the development of the writer's teaching. Then let each epistle be taken up

with a distinct recognition of its place in relation to the other epistles. While light may be found in the whole collection of the works of the same author, it is only reasonable to expect that those writings that are contemporary will best illustrate one another. For this reason it is desirable to take the epistles in the separate groups in which they appear. There are four of these groups of Pauline epistles: (1) The two epistles to the Thessalonians. (2) The four great epistles—to the Galatians, the Romans, the Corinthians. These belong to the period of conflict with the Judaizing teachers who were undoing much of the apostle's work. Here the specific theology of St. Paul is most vigorously developed. (3) The epistles of the captivity, calmer and more meditative works. (4) The pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus, the personal character of which is obvious, and which must be read as related to a late period in the apostolic age.

4. *Circumstances.*—Having cleared the ground by means of these preliminary studies, we are in a position to direct more attention to the special characteristics of the particular epistle we have selected for study. Now, we must take into account the circumstances under which it was written. These fall into two classes—the circumstances of the writer, and the circumstances of his readers.

(1) *The circumstances of the writer.* The chronological arrangement will have helped us to see at what point in the life-story of the apostle the epistle comes in, and the epistle itself will go further to show the condition

in which he is placed and his state of mind at the time of writing.

(2) *The circumstances of the readers.* These we may learn to some extent from extraneous sources, such as the Acts of the Apostles. But for the most part we must derive our information from the epistle itself. In writing to the Galatians, for instance, St. Paul lets us see the peculiar danger in which the church is placed from an invasion of the teachers of the Jerusalem party; his letter to the Corinthian church paints the corruptions of that community in lurid colors; and, in fact, all the epistles are well adjusted to the circumstances of the people to whom they are addressed, and therefore they all call for a careful consideration of those circumstances before they can be rightly comprehended.

5. *The Occasion.*—This is closely connected with the preceding topic. Most of the New Testament epistles, certainly most of St. Paul's epistles, were called forth by some special emergency. They are as far as possible from being abstract treatises. It is doubtful if many of them would have been written at all if it had not been that the peculiar condition of affairs had in each case called for some action on the part of the writer. The Thessalonians are distressed at the death of some of their number before the return of their Lord, and fear that these deceased brethren may miss the joy of the parousia; the Corinthians have written to the apostle with specific questions, to which he replies seriatim; the Galatians are in imminent

danger, and must be warned at once; the Philippians have sent gifts to the apostle, and his heart is moved to acknowledge them in the most affectionate terms; Onesimus, the fugitive slave, bears back with him the beautiful little letter to Philemon as a plea for pardon; the Epistle to the Hebrews seems to be called forth by the troubles that have fallen on the Jewish Christians, to whom it is addressed, from the persecution by their fellow-Jews. Similarly, in nearly every case we can detect something definite in the condition of the people to whom an epistle is sent, that accounts for the writing of it. It is evident that one key to a right understanding of the epistle will be found in the discovery of this fact.

6. *The Purpose.*—In every case the writer has some object that he wishes to be attained. When we can discover this we are on the road for following his argument. It is through missing the author's purpose, often because no attempt has been made to look for it, that there is so much misapprehension of the contents of an epistle. The purpose naturally grows out of the occasion. Still, it is not a mere echo. Thought and individuality of mind are exercised in meeting the peculiar requirements of each case. Therefore, when we have seized the occasion we have yet to inquire for the exact aim of the writer. Sometimes this is of a more or less complicated nature. The author may have more than one object in view. Thus in his First Epistle to the Corinthians St. Paul has to correct several distinct faults, which he deals with separately, and then to an-

swer several questions that have been put to him by his correspondents; and St. John, in his first epistle, while wishing to help and uplift his readers generally, has the definite further object of safeguarding them against erroneous and false teaching that denied the incarnation.

7. *The Course of Thought.*—In studying an epistle it is most desirable to read it right through. The selection of a chapter or a few verses here and there may leave the reader in complete ignorance of the drift of the writer's thought, and even lead to grave misapprehensions of the fragments studied. Each epistle should be regarded as a whole. It has a certain unity. True, it may be more discursive than a set treatise. The Epistle to the Hebrews comes nearer to the form of an essay carefully planned out from beginning to end, and built up as an harmonious structure throughout; and next to this the Epistle to the Romans is conceived and worked out on a definite plan. A letter-writer has the privilege of wandering on from one subject to another; the most charming letters are those which take the form of an easy, unpremeditated conversation. St. Paul's epistles often betray this character. The apostle will suddenly go off at a tangent on the chance suggestion of a single phrase. He will insert a long parenthesis, and not return to his subject till the readers have almost forgotten where he started. In some cases he will neglect to take up the broken thread. But these indications of a natural, unconventional style must not prevent us from seeing that none of the epistles are

wholly disjointed. If the course of thought is not always perfectly methodical, still it is possible to follow the movement of the writer's mind, and we must do this if we are to understand him.

It is well to have paper and pencil by our side in reading an epistle, and to note down its several topics as we go along, at the same time observing how naturally they flow one into another, as the mind of the writer moves along in a free and natural flow of thought. Then, having discovered the principal landmarks, we can proceed with more ease to make an abstract of the whole epistle. It is much better to make it for ourselves than to use an abstract that we have found in some commentary, because half the good advantage is to be derived from the actual process of constructing it. When we have our own abstract before us we are in a position to take a bird's-eye view of the epistle. It is wonderful what a revelation this will be to us if we have been accustomed hitherto to read the epistle only by chapter and verse. In some cases—preëminently with the Epistle to the Romans—there is a continuous argument running on, and it is absolutely necessary to grasp this as a whole if we would attain to anything like a true understanding of it.

8. *Specific Ideas.*—After we have traced out the line of argument or the course of the more discursive thought that runs through the epistle we are studying, there is yet another way of treating it. We can now proceed to gather up its specific ideas. If the former process was analytic, this may be called synthetic.

Here we are inquiring, What does the writer teach in this epistle? We want to set out clearly the whole of his doctrine contained in the particular document under consideration. We must bring nothing to it in the form of foreign ideas. Our business must be to ask, What do we learn from this one book? Supposing this were the only book of the Bible that had reached us, what would the revelation amount to? This inquiry involves a negative as well as a positive answer. There are certain truths taught elsewhere which do not happen to be taught here. Let us recognize the fact frankly; let us see the limitations of the epistle as well as its valuable contributions to the sum of our knowledge of divine truth.

In this way we shall discover that different epistles are valuable for conveying to us different truths. For example, we go to Galatians and Romans for St. Paul's fullest teachings of the way of forgiveness; to Corinthians for practical lessons on church life, for the doctrine of the resurrection, etc.; to Ephesians for teaching on the relation of Christ to His church; to Colossians for the glory of Christ; to Philippians for the joy of personal union with Christ; to the pastoral epistles for the duties of the ministerial office—not, of course, exclusively, but still using each epistle for its specific teaching.

In this way we are prepared to take a step further. Having got the exact teaching of one epistle, all we can see of its contents, with a distinct recognition of its limitations, of what it does not say, we are prepared to compare it with other epistles, especially with those

which come nearest to it in time or those which treat of the same topics. Here our chronological arrangement of the epistles is of immense value. By this means we can trace the progress of revelation. As we proceed we shall see how one idea after another first emerges and then becomes more and more distinct. Thus the epistles to the Thessalonians do not elaborate any of the deeper doctrines of St. Paul's theology; these doctrines are worked out in the four great epistles. The epistles of the captivity carry us on further into regions of more intense spiritual experience. In these last epistles, too, and also in the pastoral epistles, the writer is combating errors that threaten to corrupt the truths of revelation, and those truths are emphasized in contrast with the errors.

Lastly, this gathering up of the exact ideas contained within the epistles is invaluable in enabling us to compare one writer with another. From all the epistles of St. Paul we come to know the distinctive Pauline theology. This we must keep quite by itself for a right comprehension of it, separate from the teachings of other parts of the Bible, not because the essential harmony of all Scripture, as of all truth, is to be denied, but because each facet of truth should be looked at by itself if we would not be confused by a blurred image of the whole. Thus we discover St. James's theology to be very elementary, and his teachings chiefly of a practical character. It is St. Paul, we find, who elaborates the doctrine of redemption. In this he is closely followed by St. Peter, but St. John has his own peculiar way of regarding Christian truth in antithesis to

error as light over against darkness, and with a warm sympathy for its relations to life and love.

For commentaries on the epistles, see Cassell's "Commentary for Schools"; "The Cambridge Bible"; Meyer and Godet on most of the epistles; Sanday and Headlam, Vaughan, Liddon, on "Romans"; Edwards, Ellicott, Stanley, on "Corinthians"; Lightfoot on "Galatians," "Philippians," "Colossians," "Philemon"; Macpherson, Ellicott, on "Ephesians"; Jowett, Ellicott, on "Thessalonians"; Ellicott on "The Pastoral Epistles"; Westcott, Vaughan, Delitzsch, on "Hebrews"; Mayor on "James"; Westcott on "The Epistles of St. John." See also Sabatier, "The Apostle Paul."

III. THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

This book stands by itself, without rival or parallel, as a history of the early church, or, more particularly, an account first of St. Peter and then of St. Paul. In form it might be compared with the Book of Nehemiah, since it is written partly in the third person and partly in the first. Composed by St. Luke, the book is like a supplementary volume to the third Gospel. Its historical form suggests the desirability of collecting all available information on the condition of the world at the time to which it relates. The stage is the Roman empire in the first century, and some knowledge of the history of the empire and its provinces will help to explain the narrative. This is to a large extent an account of missionary travels, and therefore a map with explanatory notes will enable us to trace them out the more clearly. Where St. Paul's epistles cover the same ground these will throw light on the narrative, as that

in turn illumines the epistles. We must compare the two accounts of the apostle's visits to Jerusalem—that in the Acts and that in the Epistle to the Galatians. As we set the other epistles in their places in the history they will come in at point after point to illustrate it. Where it is difficult to reconcile the two sources of information it is only reasonable to give the preference to the epistles, as coming direct from the hand of the chief person in the history.

See "Commentary for Schools"; "The Cambridge Bible"; Hackett, "Commentary on Acts"; Conybeare and Howson, "Life and Epistles of St. Paul"; Ramsay, "Paul the Roman Citizen," etc.

IV. THE REVELATION.

Here we have to deal with that book of the Bible which more than any other has been the victim of a perfect riot of fanciful interpretation. Its very obscurity has sheltered the indulgence of innumerable vagaries. The extravagant assertions of so many writers on the Apocalypse, and the absolute contradictions that prevail among the several schools of interpreters, warn us that some sober method of exegesis is absolutely necessary if ever we are to hope for a correct view of the book.

In the first place, it is well to compare the Revelation with other works of the same nature. There are apocalyptic passages in the teachings of Christ (e.g., Mark xiii.) and in the writings of St. Paul (e.g., 1 Thess. iv.

13–18; 2 Thess. ii. 1–10). Apocalypses appeared among the Jews just about the time when our book was written, and earlier. The most famous of these is the *Book of Enoch*, referred to by St. Jude (verse 14). A common style pervades this apocalyptic literature.

In the next place, it is well to trace the imagery of the Revelation to its sources as far as this can be done. Much of it is derived from Ezekiel and Daniel, and therefore these Old Testament books should be consulted for any explanations they may give of phrases and images which can be traced back to them. The apocalyptic scheme always promises the coming of God to set right the disordered state of the world at a crisis involving terror and ruin for evil-doers, but triumph and blessedness for the people of God.

Further, the Apocalypse, being of the nature of prophecy, will partake of what we have noticed to be its characteristics. We have seen that prophecy is primarily designed for the instruction of contemporaries, and that the allusions which have so commonly been supposed to point to a far-distant future can often be explained with reference to what is occurring in the days of the prophet, though with a revelation of great truths which admit of further realization, and the best of which are only perfectly realized in the advent and work of Jesus. The presumption is, therefore, that this prophecy is of an analogous nature. It is violently improbable that in this one book of the Bible, quite contrary to the principles that govern the many books of prophecy that precede it, we have an elaborate map

of many centuries of future history, containing the rise of Mohammedanism, the corruptions of the papacy, the career of Napoleon, the advance of Russia. All that we know of the principles on which the Scriptures are inspired should lead us to question the probability of such an unparalleled production. Again it must be asserted, this is not a case of denying the power of God to make such a revelation. Of course it is perfectly possible to omnipotence. The simple fact is that we have no reason for believing that God ever does act in this way. It becomes our duty, therefore, to inquire whether the book can be interpreted of the times when it was written before we accept the wild theory that St. John was inspired to relate to Christians of the first century, in what to them must have been perfectly unintelligible language, the events that were to occur in succeeding centuries, apparently for no other reason than that the people who were to live in those later times might amuse themselves with an endless puzzle, to which every fresh inquirer was to furnish a fresh solution.

If a sober exegesis compels us to refer the historical allusion of the Apocalypse to the age when it was written we are not therefore to suppose that it loses all value for later times. The key to some of its more mysterious passages may be lost, but the wonderful spiritual truths that flash out again and again are gems of inspiration. The letters to the seven churches are pregnant with messages to many churches; the songs of the redeemed—possibly the earliest hymns of the church—supply inspired anthems for our psalmody to-

day; the beautiful picture of the heavenly Jerusalem is the cheering promise of a perfected state of society, when the reign of Christ shall be completely established, for here, as in all the greatest prophecies, the crowning realization is still of the future.

See "The Cambridge Bible"; "Commentary for Schools"; Milligan, "The Apocalypse"; Russell, "The Parousia."

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